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AN
INNOCENT
ABROAD

By the Same Author:

NOVELS

Tamiko
Jenny Wren
Winds, Blow Gently
Spring is not Gentle
Only the Unafraid
Still the Heart Sings
Broken Melody
Armerdale
Dark Surrender

BIOGRAPHY

The Private Life of de Maupassant

POETRY

River of Souls

LETTERS

Letters of an Unknown

PLAYS

Battle of the Sexes
Christina
Many Loves

MUSICAL PLAY

Carolina

*AN
INNOCENT
ABROAD*

by Ronald Kirkbride

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for

*who else but Junko, who, sharing
our indignities, moulded them into
a corner-stone, upon which a life
was built*

AN
INNOCENT
ABROAD



BELIEVE it or not, I never left Kern County, California, but once, when I was born. Mom and Dad was on vacation in the Canadian Rockies and got stuck there because I arrived two months early. I never thought back on the consequences until I got messed up on this trip I'm going to tell you about to England, where Mom now lives with my stepfather, a damn limey, but I've thought plenty about it since, I can tell you.

Mom met this guy about a year ago when she went to Santa Barbara to visit my Aunt Ethel who moved there from Houston, but I don't know much about that county, or Texas, for that matter, as I was always too busy working our farm near Bakersfield to take time off fooling around. It was a fine farm, I can tell you. Dad and I built it from nothing, so to speak, there on the south bank of the river, and I wouldn't never have left it if Dad hadn't died of shock the night we struck oil in our back-yard digging a new water well, and Mom hadn't met this limey. Seems everything kind of blew up at once. Then this man from the Sunset Oil Company walked into the house and offered us as much dough as we could use for the rest of our lives if we'd sell out, so we had to think about that.

Mom and I talked it over and she said she was tired of

Bakersfield and wanted to go and live with this guy in Kent, where the dukes come from and all, and wanted me to go along, too. Well, I didn't like the idea a bit, but I could see how Mom was feeling, all bright and eager like, with tears coming and going when she spoke, so I told her I'd give her my answer when I'd seen what he looked like.

She brought him to lunch the next day when I wasn't expecting it. I was out in my shirtsleeves, feeding the pigs, smelling pretty bad, and was I embarrassed! But the limey didn't seem to care. He shook hands and sat down in Dad's chair as if he owned the place, which got me kind of sore, but I could see he wasn't too much of a swell, though he wasn't no duke neither, just Mr. Loftus Beauman-Creach, can you believe it? He had one of those big Air Force moustaches you see in the movies, and a big throaty laugh, but his body was as thin as a stick due to not having enough to eat during the war, Mom said, though, he was so tall he reached the ceiling. I couldn't figure out what Mom saw in him to make her keep squirming about in her chair as if there was ants in her stockings, but then it wasn't really any of my business. When Mom finally quieted down some we sat facing each other and talked about it again. It seemed this Beauman-Creach had a big house near Tonbridge, Kent, which was so old he had to get back straight away before the roof fell in, and there was the hops he had to harvest in July, and a dairy farm he wanted me to manage for him. I thought about it awhile and said I didn't mind if he wasn't fit enough to handle it himself, and this made Mom turn white, but he seemed pleased enough, laughing and slapping his knee with his hand.

So that's how I happened to leave California. Mom and Beauman-Creach got married in the Town Hall the day after we sold the farm, then took off by air over the North Pole, but I didn't want to get mixed up in any goddam honeymoon, naturally, so I checked into a hotel for a week to think what to do next. Then I got this idea of going to England the other way around, through Japan and India.

With my pockets stuffed with the money I got for my share of the farm, I didn't see no reason why I shouldn't see some of the world on the way. And I remembered going to a movie called *Sayonara* and not minding it too much. I liked the girls, that is, the way they dressed and wore their hair, and how they seemed to fall for this Marlon Brando who I always thought was pretty much of a drip. But I figured if they could go for *him*, I might have a chance to meet one or two myself and maybe get to really know them, if you know what I mean. Then when I began to think about it I realized I was getting pretty fed up with the girls I'd been stepping out with in Bakersfield, anyhow. They're the rugged, outdoor, beat-up type, which is all right if you understand that it stays around 90 degrees in the valley most of the year, so I guess the heat kind of does something to their skins, because all the girls I ever seen in Bakersfield have this sort of high sheen like you see on Highway 99 in August and September.

Well, I began to take to this idea of going to Japan, Hong Kong, India, and so on, and went out straight away and bought a ticket to London at the American Express Company. They wanted to put me on a bitty Italian boat that had just come through the Panama Canal, but I told them I didn't have too much time to waste as I had to be in England in July. So they gave me a ticket on this Pan American plane that looked like a big white whale, and after I'd got my passport and all, off I flew.

I'd like to tell you something about my stop-over at Hawaii, but to be perfectly honest I didn't even know when we landed. I was down in the bar where you can look through the window and see the clouds passing and a few black dots they like to tell you are boats, having a drink with this cute little hostess from St. Paul, Minnesota, when I must have passed out. Anyway, when I woke up the hostess told me, rather icy, I thought, that we was coming into Wake Island. I asked her what time it was and she said "Midnight." Christ! I'd been asleep for nine hours!

So I didn't see Wake neither, just a lot of blue lights on the airstrip where we landed, and a big bright one shining through the window where I sat while we refuelled. Then we took off for Japan.

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IT was still pretty dark when we circled over this mountain they call Fuji, but I wasn't too disappointed not to see it because they said you couldn't hardly ever see it anyhow, even in daylight, as it was always hidden in mist.

We made a fine landing—the pilot did, that is—and then I was hustled into a long shed where I met these Japs for the first time. I mean there wasn't any girls there, so naturally I thought of them as Japs and couldn't help calling them that in my mind because, well, we did have some trouble with them during the war. But somehow I never think of a girl as anything but Japanese, I don't know why. But these were Japs all right who met us in the shed, dressed up in some sort of uniform and all, and if they'd been carrying those long curved swords I'd have changed my mind and climbed back on to the plane. But they wasn't very tall so I thought better of it. One of them lifted my bag on to a bench, opened it, and began poking about in it, asking me how many cigarettes I had, so I told him I wasn't addicted, but he didn't seem to understand and got sore for some reason or other, for he messed all over my new pig-skin with a piece of chalk before sending me into the next room.

I got my passport stamped again, then there was this

trouble about dollars. First the Jap asked me if I had any travellers' cheques, and I told him the only cheque I had was for my bag setting there on the floor, which I'd torn up. Then he wanted to know how many American dollars I had on me. I had about ten thousand dollars stuffed in one pocket or another which was my share of the farm, but I wasn't going to say anything about it to him. I took out a fifty-dollar bill from my wallet and gave it to him knowing I'd never see it again, which I didn't. He pulled it through the iron grill he was standing behind and slipped it into a drawer and gave me this yen in exchange for it. I know a country likes to print its own bills and call them what it wants, so I didn't say nothing, just put it in my wallet. Then he took my passport and wrote something in it which I looked at real close. FOREIGN EXCHANGE RECORD 8649 HANEDA CUSTOMS \$50 USA DOLLARS, it said. That was all right by me, though a little confusing, and as he didn't seem interested any more, I turned and walked out to where the bus was waiting at the curb, hiding a big grin because of the way I'd outsmarted him.

The American Express Company back in Bakersfield said they'd booked a room for me at the Ikaho Hotel in Tokyo, so I told the driver of the bus I'd like to be let off there. "Ritz," he said, and I said, "No, the *Ikaho*," and he said, "O.K., Ritz," so that's where I ended up.

I didn't see much of the countryside on the way. There wasn't any countryside as a matter of fact, but I didn't know about that until I'd been in Japan for two or three days. We drove through the airport gate into a swarm of traffic such as I never seen the like of, but the driver never once looked right or left, just put his thumb on the horn and kept it there, weaving in and out of the bitty streets which had gaping holes in the middle, so I nearly got sick. Then there was these bicycles criss-crossing back and forth, with a whole family on the back carrying their victuals above their heads on trays, and streetcars coming up behind like rockets,

blowing their trumpets which was operated by compressed air, and these cabs and three-wheeled trucks honking, and wagons banging, so I thought I'd never see Tokyo before it was blown off the map.

But somehow we got to the Ritz Hotel, which I guess you've heard about. I didn't think too much of it, to be perfectly honest. It had a fountain out front with a few dead water lilies in it, and the building was of some dark yellowish brick, low and rambling like a boxwood maze. Inside it was full of people walking up and down, mostly Americans sweating in the heat, but there was one or two Japanese girls dressed in kimonos with these bustle-like cushions tied on to their backs, and I began to get pretty excited just seeing them there, knowing I really was in Japan, six thousand miles from Bakersfield, California.

Well, I thought I'd ask for a room as I didn't know where this Ikaho Hotel was located, and didn't care now that I'd seen these girls in the lobby. So I went to the desk and asked the clerk what he had to offer. He said they was booked solid for three months, but if I was really in a fix he could put me up in a suite where they'd had a robbery. This American who'd been hit over the head was in the hospital and wasn't expected back for a few days. I said that was damn considerate of him, and paid a week in advance, which was about all the time I had to spare in Japan, anyway.

It wasn't a bad room, though I wouldn't exactly call it a suite. It had a couple of beds in it, a writing desk, and a canvas what-you-call-it to set your bag down on. But I couldn't put my bag on it because there was this other bag setting there belonging to this guy who was in the hospital. The drawers was empty so the maid must have packed his things, which I thought was pretty decent of her. The best thing was the bathroom, which had a tub made out of rocks stacked together and pipes that looked like branches to make you feel you was setting in the garden, which was kind of embarrassing, I have to admit.

I wasn't feeling too good after the long airplane ride, but when I'd bathed and had a sandwich I went for a walk. I didn't know how I was going to get to meet one of these Japanese girls, but I didn't have any time to waste, so I asked the doorman where was there something going on at this hour of the day.

"You want Japanese girl, yiss?"

"Well," I said, nonchalant like, "I wasn't thinking about that in particular."

"Ginza bars full of nice girls. Turn right straight ahead."

I thanked him and walked on past some big stone office buildings and department stores and restaurants with electric lights flashing on and off in broad daylight. Then I got to a cluster of little alleys lined with rickety wooden shops and tea-rooms and bars with lanterns hanging out front over the bamboo doors. There wasn't signs on any of the streets, so I couldn't tell if it was the Ginza or not, but it looked like the kind of place the doorman was talking about. Thousands of people was coming and going, dressed in kimonos and wearing these getas which clackety-clacked on the cobblestones. The men carried crates of vegetables or poultry under their arms, and the women had their kids tied on to their backs, so you could see the tops of their shaved heads bobbing about, and there was lots of cute little kokeshi dolls in the windows and food all set out on plates to show you what they had inside to eat, as you never could tell what it was after it was cooked. It was quite a sight, it really was, and I got more and more steamed up as I went along.

Then I noticed this Jap stretched out asleep or drunk in the middle of the alley, his legs spread apart. People was walking over him as if he wasn't there at all. I stood and watched for a while, until a cop came over and lifted him as if he was a baby and leaned him against the wall. The Jap didn't even open his eyes. He just kind of hung there as if he was on a coat-hanger or something while I asked the cop where Ginza was. There was no sign or numbers on the

streets, as I said, so he pointed with his baton, twisting and turning on his heels as if he was walking there himself, but reaching out every now and then to keep the drunk from slipping off the wall. Finally I got the drift of what the cop was trying to say, and thanked him. He nodded and walked off, and the drunk fell back on to the cobblestones where people could tramp over him once more.

I got to thinking as I walked on what nice cops there was in Japan. In California they would have slapped the guy in jail for vagrancy or given him the third degree. I figured these cops was the nicest cops in the world.

I reached a bar called Ginza and knew I'd found the section all right. Through the window I saw five Japanese girls setting at a table looking as if they was bored to tears. None of them could have been over seventeen, and they wore these tight-fitting Chinese dresses with slits up the side, so even through the window you could see their bare legs and olive bright skin clear up to I don't know where. I got kind of excited, I have to admit.

I pushed open the door and strolled over to the bar, leisurely like, but then I noticed there was a bunch of Japs in the back of the room playing cards. They didn't say nothing, just looked at me out of narrow, slanting eyes, puffing away at cigarettes. I broke into a cold sweat, for the room was creepy as all hell, and there wasn't a single sound except the snapping of these cards on the table. I was about to turn and run out when one of the hostesses came mincing up on her high heels, said "Hi!" and slipped her arm around my neck. I jumped a foot in the air, I really did, for it was like nothing I'd ever known before, I mean the touch of her bare skin, like milk and honey and olive oil poured over you all at once.

Then this little Jap with gold teeth and a dirty apron ran up waving his arms and shouting. I didn't know what was the matter with him, but I wasn't too interested because this girl was stroking the back of my neck with her fingers

and rubbing her hair against my face, so I told him: "Two straight bourbons, on the trot."

The Jap kept on shouting, and I caught a few words he was saying, like "off-limit" and "no G.I." and "habba-habba" and "go home," which got me kind of sore, but I didn't want no trouble and reached out and patted him real friendly like on the shoulder.

"Listen," I said. "I'm no G.I.—I just want a drink—and one for this lady."

Well, he wouldn't serve us a drink, that was the core of it, just kept on jabbering away and waving his arms, so I said: "Now what if you came to Bakersfield—that's where I live in the States—and I wouldn't let you in my bar because you was a Jap? How would you like that?"

He looked at me kind of blank, and I said: "I mean if you'd won the war, like we done. You know what you'd do? You'd do something like this," and I gave him a pretty good one square on the jaw.

I guess maybe I forgot how big I am and how small these Japs are—I was six feet four in my stockings when I measured myself on my twenty-second birthday—because he flew across the room as if he had wings and came crashing down on the table where these sharks was sitting playing cards. Things was dead quiet for a minute, while they picked themselves up off the floor, then all hell broke loose. I remember knocking about ten heads together before one of the Japs ran out into the alley screaming as if he'd gone berserk. The girls was jammed up in the corner making sounds like one of those slow-playing records that's been put on high speed by mistake. I went up and apologized and they stopped jabbering and began to giggle. Then while I was adjusting my tie in rushes a swarm of cops. I didn't mind, for I knew how nice the Jap cops was, and I was kind of glad to see them, to tell you the truth. Anyway, they came running in and took one look at the sharks lying on the floor, and then, can you believe it, they conked me; they must have, because

the next thing I remember I was setting propped up in one of these old three-wheeled trucks I'd seen on my way from the airport which they use to round up prostitutes, and there was cuffs on my wrists, and a cop standing over me holding a gun big enough to kill a polar bear. And standing up in the far corner was these five hostesses, all dressed up to the teeth, looking like they was going to a banquet at the Grand Hotel.

3

THE cops sure had me fooled, I have to admit. They hauled us to a crummy police station under the Shim-bashi railway tracks where they grilled me until it was almost dark. You'd have thought I was an international spy the way they carried on, fingerprinting me and going through my papers at least a hundred times. I wouldn't never have gotten out of there if it wasn't for one of the hostesses called Kimi who spoke pretty good English.

The girls sat on a bench in this corny room listening to me getting balled out, waiting their turn, because in Japan the man always comes first, can you believe it. He walks first down the street, eats his meals first, and gets hung first. Well, after this chief cop had jabbered at me for a couple of hours one of the hostesses got up from the bench and spoke to him. The cop was so mad at being interrupted he turned on his heel and slapped her across the mouth, as if arresting me for assault was any different to what he done. But the girl didn't blink an eye. She wiped her mouth and said, slow and icy: "He didn't mean harm. He was talking to Sadako when Mr. Osumi insulted him at bar."

The cop pushed her away and said in English: "Shut up. Your turn next. Name?"

"Kimi Ogata," the girl said.

The cop started writing this down, then he stopped.

"Saburo Ogata's daughter?"

She nodded, ice cold.

"What you doing in Ginza bar looking like Chinese whore?" he said, very suspicious, but careful not to slap her any more.

"I left home to look for work. It's hard to find good job in Tokyo. My friend Neya brought me to Ginza first time this morning, just for one or two days. Why you hold us, anyway?"

"Mr. Osumi angry. His bar smashed because of you girls."

"He's *baka*!" Kimi said. "How can girls smash bar?"

"You helped *him* smash," the cop said, jerking his head at me.

Just then Osumi walked in to sign the complaint, and all hell broke loose once more. The girls started screaming at him and the cops started yelling at the girls. I'd had about enough of it, I really had, so I walked over to the Jap and gave him a wad of yen that was in my pocket.

"Forget about your lousy bar," I said. "Let the girls go home."

He took the yen and stuffed it into his shirt. Then he started hollering and waving his arms about again. The chief cop spoke to Kimi in Japanese and she told me:

"Mr. Osumi's lost face. The police can't let us go until you apol'gize."

"I gave him dough, didn't I? He took it, didn't he?"

"That's why he's lost face," Kimi said. "You must say to him you're sorry, three times, and bow."

"To that jerk? Not on your life," I said, and sat down.

"Then we stay here all night," Kimi said. "But you do what you think right. I don't mind to stay—I've nowhere to go, anyway."

"For Chrissake!" I said. But I got up and went over to the jerk and bowed till my head touched the floor. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Then it was as if spring and summer'd burst over the

room all at once. The cops broke out into broad smiles, and Osumi grabbed my hand and pumped it up and down, and the girls giggled, and then I found myself out in the street with Osumi who said he knew where there was some really nice hostesses if I'd come with him to this new bar. I told him it was mighty good of him, but I wasn't interested, which was perfectly true, because I couldn't stand to look at his ugly face another minute, and because Kimi was walking away down an alley by herself and I wanted to catch her up and thank her for what she done.

When I reached her she was just about to cross one of these big Shimbashi streets all lit up with neon signs.

"Hello, where you going?" I asked, and took her arm because the traffic was really awful.

She pushed me away, and I almost fell on my face. I'd no idea she was so strong, for she was just a bitty thing. Her bones were so small and fragile they looked as if they'd crumble in your hands.

When we'd finally got across the street I asked her what was the matter, what I'd done wrong. Without looking up she said: "In Japan girls mustn't be seen walking with foreigner. You're big foreigner—like skyscraper over Tokyo."

"You don't like Americans?" I asked her.

"I like Americans very much," she said, keeping five feet away. "I left home because only Japanese boys live in Tokushima. Want someday to marry American and see whole world. Tokyo too small."

There was nothing I chose to say to that, so I asked her again where she was going.

"Where you stay?" she said.

"Ritz Hotel."

"What's your name?"

"Elvis Presley," I lied, because I thought things was getting out of hand, and I didn't know just what was going to happen next.

"Elvis Presley's dark," she said. "Your hair's red."

"I dyed it," I said.

"What's your real name? William Holden?"

"Elmer Hooker," I told her, and was sorry after I said it because we was passing the hotel and she'd stopped and was looking across the lily pond into the lobby with an expression that really worried me.

"I stay hotel with you tonight," she said. "Nowhere else to go till Monday. Tomorrow's Sunday and we can go to Atami Springs if you like. You want to see Japan, *ne*?"

"Sure," I said. "That's what I came here for."

"Then we go to bed early and wake up early and catch Pigeon."

"Why catch pigeons?" I asked, beginning to think she was nuts.

"Name of fast train to Atami."

"Oh," I said, and discovered we was nearly at the front entrance where the doorman was standing on the mat watching us.

I got panicky then, because Kimi was wearing this bright red Chinese dress with slits up the sides, and the doorman was looking at her as if he'd never seen anything like it before. I thought back to the time I'd tried to bring a girl to a hotel room I'd taken one night in Los Angeles, and how they tossed us into the street, baggage and all. I didn't want anything like that to happen, so I grabbed Kimi by the hand and ran with her out of the drive and circled round to the side entrance where there was a gang of workmen digging up the road. My room was just above on the second floor, and I thought if I got a rope I could hoist her up there so she wouldn't have to pass through the lobby. I remembered I done that with a goat I bought when I was a youngster at school, and nobody never found out about it until Christmas. But the workmen was there, and I thought better of it. Instead I took Kimi through the side door and along the arcade. The stores was closed, and there was nobody about. I held my breath and walked way up front of her as if I didn't know she'd been born. We got as far as the downstairs bar when I ran headlong into this clerk who'd checked

me in at the hotel. He looked up and smiled and was going to say something, I'm sure, because he opened his mouth wide, but I shot right past him up the stairs. Kimi joined me in a few minutes, then I unlocked my door and pushed her into the room.

I was shaking like a leaf. I sat down on the bed to catch my breath, congratulating myself on how I'd managed to get her up without no one being the wiser, when I saw she'd picked up the phone. I yelled and tried to snatch the receiver away, but she was already talking to the office, ordering all kinds of dishes, *sake*, and I don't know what else.

"Room 223," she said, "quick, because we're tired and want to go to bed."

I nearly hit the ceiling!

Well, I lay there exhausted on the bed while Kimi went sniffing about the room like she never saw a bed or a dresser or a suitcase in her life. Then she popped into the bathroom and gave a squeal that had me standing bolt upright on the carpet.

"What lovely bath! I wash before eating, *ne*?"

"Oh, no, you don't," I said, but my words must have been drowned out by the rush of water she'd turned on, because before I could reach the door bits of clothing came flying out. Then the door snapped shut and I could hear her singing out the window that looked down over the garden where all the guests was having drinks. I shut my ears, but I was like an ostrich with his head in the sand. I sat down again on the bed and waited for the manager to walk in.

So when there was a loud rap on the door I was ready and went and opened it, and walked back to pack my suitcase. A waiter in a white coat entered carrying a tray stacked with dishes, which he set on the table.

"Good evening, sir," he said, real friendly like. You could have knocked me over with a feather.

And then while the waiter was rattling the dishes, the bathroom door opened and Kimi stuck her head out and said: "My shoes and stockings, please," and while I sat

frozen to the bed the waiter picked them up and passed them through the door. "Thank you, Miss," he said, "I thought you'd like these," and he handed her a pair of chopsticks! Then he left. I didn't know what to make of it, I really didn't.

Kimi came out of the bathroom looking mighty pretty, I must admit. She still wore the red dress as there wasn't anything else she could put on, but her hair was tied up in bright blue ribbons she'd taken from her handbag and she smelled like a whole bed of gardenias. Now that we was alone and everything seemed to be going all right, much better than I expected, in fact, I quieted down. In one way, that is, and we sat at the table and ate dishes of raw pink fish and rice, and fried fish and rice, and stewed meat and rice. Between each dish Kimi filled up these little cups with *sake*, which was also made of rice, and to be perfectly honest, by the end of the meal I didn't care if I never saw a dish of rice again. But the *sake* was warming me up like a furnace and I got a kick out of watching Kimi eat with chopsticks, picking up every crumb like they was diamonds.

Finally the waiter came and took away the dishes, bowing himself out as if we was royalty. When he'd shut the door I gave a big sigh because Kimi, after wiping the table clean, had switched off the big light and was turning down one of the beds. She'd thrown off her shoes and one of them was setting in the middle of the room with the toe pointing skyward. It made me feel like I was in one of these *salons* they have in Paris, France. Anyway, I knew we had to get up early in the morning, and I was thinking we didn't have too much time to get acquainted, so I went into the bathroom and climbed into the pool. The whole place smelled of gardenias, and there was Kimi's handbag still on the chair under the window, and I could hear her talking to herself as she moved about outside. I lay back soaking in the water, thinking that tonight was sure going to be worth all the trouble it'd taken me to get to Japan, and feeling like a damn' fool because I'd promised Mom I'd be in England in

July, which was just three weeks off, when I could have stayed in Japan for months getting to really know the islands, if you know what I mean.

Kimi had stopped talking to herself and the room grew quiet all of a sudden, though outside in the street there was this siren shrieking. But I didn't pay no attention to it as I had other things on my mind. I found some of this gardenia scent which Kimi had used and which was still on the shelf over the basin, marked: "Compliments of the management," and sprayed myself all over with it. Then I wrapped up in one of the big blue towels that was hanging on the rail, and stepped out into the room.

The beds was empty and there was only one light burning. I couldn't see Kimi anywhere. I thought she'd run out on me, and was about to chase her down the corridor when I noticed the blanket on one of the beds was missing. Then I walked round back of the bed and found her laying on the floor fast asleep. I sure was surprised, but then I remembered that the Japanese always sleep on the floor, seem to prefer it in fact, as I guess Kimi did. Anyway, she looked real pretty laying there with her eyes closed, her long lashes resting against her pale cheek, her hair spread out like a black cloud on the white blanket. I knelt down beside her and was about to give her a shake to wake her up so we could get a few things straightened out, when there came this loud banging on the door. Before I could get to my feet the door flew open and two Japs dressed in white walked in, carrying a stretcher. Laying out flat on the stretcher was this slob swathed in bandages. You couldn't see nothing of him but his nose.

"This room 223?" one of the Japs asked.

"Sure," I said, "but—"

Without another word they dumped the guy right out of the stretcher onto my bed. Then they gave me a couple of low bows and left, slamming the door behind them.

I went to the bed and looked down at the jerk. He was mumbling and blubbering as if he was trying to tell me

something, so I bent down real close until my ear was up against his mouth. Then he hollered:

"I'M JOE SKENK! WHAT THE HELL YOU DOING IN MY ROOM?"

I could have torn off his bandages then and there, and cracked open his head once more.

4

WE checked out early in the morning after Kimi had woken up and found this Frankenstein stretched out on the sheet, snoring his head off. I thought she was going to pass out, but I explained to her that it was really his room I'd been loaned, and after that she was all right. When she'd washed and combed her hair we threw a blanket over the guy and beat it out of there.

We took a taxi to the station where Kimi'd left her things in a locker. She didn't have a suitcase—I never seen a Jap carrying one, as a matter of fact. She had her things tied up in a big silk handkerchief they call a *furoshiki*. While she went to the ladies' room to change I bought two tickets to Atami. Then she appeared dressed in a pale blue kimono with cork sandals. You could have bowled me over. She looked like this beautiful Japanese princess you see everywhere in the papers. To be perfectly honest I was embarrassed to talk to her, much less to find myself climbing on to a train with her to spend the night at a hotel she said she knew about, overlooking the sea. I was damned confused, I really was, and shaking all over at the thought of what was going to happen when we got there.

This Pigeon was one of the best trains I ever rode on. Each car had a cute Japanese girl dressed in uniform with a

tiny hat tipped over one eye who swept up under the seats every few minutes. Concert music played all the time, and they served rice-balls stuffed with vegetables, and bottles of cold *sake*. The only thing I didn't much care for was the toilet. It was one of these Japanese *benjos*, which was nothing more than a hole in the floor. You had to stand up, or crouch down, and it was goddam awkward, I can tell you, with the train roaring and jerking through the towns. There was a seat hanging on the wall especially for American tourists, which you could take down if you wanted to and put over the hole, but it wasn't attached to nothing and soon you found yourself sliding all over the floor as if you was riding on one of these bumper cars they have at the county fair.

We sat side by side and looked out the window. Kimi wouldn't let me hold her hand or anything like that, but she talked a good deal and pointed out things I should know about. There was millions of small wooden shacks pressed so close against the track I was afraid we was going to take the roofs off when we passed by. The narrow streets was packed with people.

Then we got to the rice fields. They looked like tiny squares on a checker board overrun by maggots. Men, women, and kids wearing dark blue kimonos was planting rice in the puddles. They wore trousers over the kimonos which bogged down into the water, and big straw coolie hats. Winding alongside the track was a road plastered with tea houses and Shinto shrines. Peaked mountains rose up in the distance. Now and then you could see a big stone Buddha perched on top of one of these peaks as if it'd been dropped there out of the blue.

After about two hours we got to the sea and kept along it for a while. But even that was crowded with boats, and on the beaches fishermen was laying out seaweed to dry in the sun. It seemed there wasn't a foot of ground in all Japan that wasn't crawling with people picking something up or

putting something down, pushing something, or pulling it around.

I got to thinking about Kimi and wondered if she'd ever worked in the rice fields. I didn't know nothing about her background and I was beginning to get curious, because we only had about an hour before we got to Atami and I wasn't sure about how I should act now that she'd changed into a kimono and looked like a princess. So I asked her.

"Yes, during the war," she said. "I helped my uncle in his field. We all helped because we had nothing to eat. Rice that once came from China and Burma all gone—our ships had to carry troops."

"What about your dad?" I asked. "What's he do?"

"Teaches school in Kuchita."

"Sounds fine. Why'd you run off to Tokyo?"

"Only Japanese live on island. Wanted to meet American husband."

We was back on that again, so I shut my mouth and didn't say nothing more until we pulled into the station at Atami.

Kimi said we could walk to the hotel, and that suited me all right. It was pretty hot and I took off my coat and slung it over my bag. It was a nice little town, sort of a resort, and there wasn't any foreigners about, which I liked. Kimi made me walk four paces in front of her, but told me which way to turn, and we went down a curving road to the edge of the sea where a big Japanese hotel called Fuji-ya lay stretched out on the street level, its front windows looking over the water. It was quite a place. A servant met us and took our shoes and gave us cloth slippers in exchange. Then we crossed to the desk where the manager was standing. He bowed and said: "Very hoppy have American guest. Sign, prease," and pushed the book at me.

I didn't know what to do. I should have got it straight with Kimi while we was on the train. My face was burning, but when I looked at her she seemed calm enough, and picked up the pen and wrote: "Mr. Elmer Hooker and

guest." The manager bowed again, then led us down the hall to a big airy room with nothing in it except straw mats on the floor and a low table out on the balcony. We bowed to each other six or seven more times, then we was left alone.

I didn't know what to think, I really didn't. Here we was bedded in for the night, yet Kimi'd never once let me hold her hand or even walk beside her on the street. I figured I'd never get to understand how these Japanese girls felt about things, or how their minds worked.

I felt jittery as all hell. There wasn't a chair to sit on, so I paced up and down on the mats, went on to the balcony to look at the sea, then came back in again. Kimi'd opened her *furoshiki* and was slipping off her kimono. I got a glimpse of her slim golden body and her small pointed breasts, like ripe olives, and then she slipped into a pair of blue slacks and a blouse, leaving me shaking so I could hardly stand up.

When she'd looked at herself in the mirror above the basin, she went over and began to unpack my bag. She slid back one of the panels on the wall and hung up my two suits in the closet. Then she found some soiled underwear and took them to the basin and washed them. I didn't like her doing that, but it made things kind of homey, and all of a sudden I wanted to take her in my arms right then and there. But just as I was getting up courage to cross over to her the door slid open and a maid crawled in on her knees, holding a tray on which was two cups of tea. She crawled all the way to the balcony and set the tray down on the table, then crawled back, bowing herself out without a word.

When Kimi'd hung up my things to dry we sat down on the mat and sipped the tea. Again I didn't hardly recognize her in her blouse and slacks. If it hadn't been for her slanting eyes and shiny black hair I'd have thought she was one of the girls I used to watch crossing the street to the grammar school outside Bakersfield. She was bubbling over with a sort of secret happiness and could hardly sit still, yet she

kept looking at me to see if I was comfortable or bored or needed something done.

I wasn't any more bored than if I'd been setting in a harem, but when we'd finished tea she got straight up and said: "Come—we go shopping. I buy towel for bath later and you see Atami."

I said, "O.K." and we went out, picking up our shoes at the front entrance.

I guess we covered about every street in town. The stores was plastered with these kokeshi dolls, though different from the ones I'd seen in Tokyo, rude as hell to be perfectly honest, but I couldn't look at them as close as I wanted because of Kimi being there. She bought a towel with ATAMI printed on it in big green letters, and a pair of nylons, but she wouldn't let me pay for them, not for a thing. I wanted to buy her a flower in a shop we passed, but she said it wasn't lucky and bought it herself, sticking it in her hair and dancing around as if it was a diamond tiara.

It must have been about six o'clock when we started back to the hotel. We cut through a street, where there was a small stream running down the middle, lined with red lanterns. We hadn't taken two steps before I noticed these two-storey wooden shacks on both sides. Outside each one was about twenty girls in pink and blue and red kimonos jammed together behind a fence like cattle in a pen. They looked real pretty until we got closer and I saw their faces was caked with powder and greasy mascara. As we walked past they leaned over the fence and cried: "H'lo, you want some fun?" or "Hey, G.I.!" until after a time the whole street was full of screaming girls waving and struggling to get up closer to the fence.

I knew what they was, of course, and I tried to pass them off as if I didn't have any idea what the fuss was all about. But Kimi knew all right, because she shook her head, her eyes real sad, and told me: "This is the last week prostitutes permitted in Japan. Terrible thing. They've no place to go after Monday."

"How'd they get into the business in the first place?" I asked.

"Father who has large family sells one or two daughters to Mama-san. They can never leave. If they escape from house police bring them back."

"Can't they buy themselves out?"

"Can, but never manage. Mama-san charge for powder, kimono, washing—girls always in debt. Very bad, but still they have home and food. Don't know what will happen to them now—too many girls in Japan."

I hurried Kimi out of the street, but I didn't say nothing after that till we got to the hotel. There was nothing I wanted to say, and I was feeling kind of guilty bringing Kimi to Atami after seeing these girls herded there behind the fences. I didn't know if she was one of them herself or not, and was just kidding me about running away from home. I didn't know what to think or how to act, and I guess I was sore because she hadn't come right out and told me what to expect after I'd brought her all the way from Tokyo and paid her fare and all.

Anyway, as I was here I figured I might as well make the best of it. We went back to the room and Kimi said she was going to take a bath before dinner. She reached into the closet and pulled out two kimonos, one for herself and one for me, which she explained belonged to the hotel, and which we was supposed to wear for the rest of the evening. She put one on before slipping out of her slacks, then picked up the towel she'd bought and went out.

I slipped off my things and put on the other kimono. There was two sections to it, one cotton and one silk, with a big sash you had to tie round your waist, and it wasn't too easy to handle, though I managed all right. Then I found another towel hanging on the rail and went down the corridor looking for the bathroom.

I got about half-way down the passage when I ran into two Japanese maids who started giggling the moment they set eyes on me. I didn't pay no attention to them, but one

stopped me as I was passing. "Excuse, please. Kimono inside out," she said, and before I knew what had happened she'd pulled the sash and snatched the kimono off, leaving me standing there stark naked in the middle of the hall.

Between them they took about five minutes to get the kimono back on again, and I was pretty sore because there was guests passing back and forth all the time roaring their heads off. And there wasn't really no need to put it back on at all; I'd been standing in front of the bathroom door all the time. Finally I went across and opened it, leaving the maids there watching me.

I didn't get far, though, because I came slap up against six or seven Japanese ladies undressing, and backed out quick. Then these maids in the hall started to howl their heads off again, telling me to go back in. I didn't know what to do, if you really want to know—go into the room as the maids said, or stand out there in the hall where everybody was roaring with laughter. I figured if the ladies didn't mind, it wasn't up to me to argue about it, and I walked in and shut the door.

The ladies were stark by then, crouching down and tucking the clothes they'd taken off into straw baskets on the floor. They didn't even glance up. I could see a big pool glimmering through the glass doors up ahead, and a man scratching himself in the entrance, and figured I wasn't in too much of a fix. I slipped off my kimono, dropped it in one of the baskets, and walked out to the bath.

There was about fifty ladies setting on the edge of the pool, all stark, and another twenty or so splashing about in the water. I couldn't see but this one old Jap, and to tell the truth I was so embarrassed my whole body was glowing like a neon sign. Anyway, all the stark ladies turned and looked at me because I was the only stark foreigner there, and I could see it was going to be who was going to outstare who, so I dived into the bath.

I knew I'd done something wrong the moment I hit the water, because all the ladies who was splashing about

jumped out, jabbering and waving like mad. Then this old Jap came running over, grabbed me, and pulled me out on to the tiles. He dragged me to one of these little wooden stools I noticed when I came in and set me down on it. He pointed to a cake of soap and a bucket lying near-by, and stood over me, arms folded. I figured I was supposed to set on this tiny stool before a hundred Japanese ladies and wash before I could get back into the pool.

Well, I wasn't going to do it. I'd had enough, I really had. If the ladies had been young and pretty I might have had a second thought, but they was all around sixty with skins so creased they looked like they'd been dug out of the ground a million years ago. So I got up and walked out.

I was glad I did, because just as I was leaving, in walked a troupe of schoolgirls, with their headmistress, all stark as the day they was born.

5

WHEN I got back to the room I asked Kimi where she'd been, as I hadn't seen her in the bath. She said that was right, I hadn't, and wasn't ever likely to, neither. Then I told her what had happened to me and she shrugged and said there was eight different hot springs in the hotel, four of them private and if I liked to bathe with the local community it was all right with her. But it wasn't all right, I could see that, so I told her about the ugly old gals who was there, and she laughed and brightened up again.

I was glad because I didn't want the evening spoiled. I felt real hopeful about what might happen later. Anyway, the maid brought our dinner and set it on the table on the balcony, and there we sat eating and sipping *sake* and talking about Kimi's brother who was married and lived in a place called Chiba near Tokyo. A big red moon came up out of the sea and hung over us, turning Kimi's hair into flame, and brightening her eyes, and down below on the beach someone was strumming a samisen, so I could hardly keep my mind on what Kimi was saying.

"Minya, my brother, was brought up very strict in Japanese tradition. He doesn't like me to go with foreigners, but I tell him I don't care, I like Americans. His wife was very pretty once, but not now because she has three children and

works very hard. Never goes out except maybe once in three months. Cooks, washes, and waits for Minya to come home, but he spends every night at geisha house."

"Why doesn't she walk out?" I asked her.

"Where? She couldn't marry again. Japanese boys only marry virgin girls. Maybe she work in factory for ten dollar a month rest of her life."

"That's all you get paid?"

"Maybe twelve, fifteen dollar. So she stays with husband no matter how he treats her. I understand custom. Father has geisha girl, too, and Mama-san not complain. But I like American way. American husbands don't go out with geisha and give wife bad time."

"I wouldn't know about that," I said. "We got no geisha girls. If we had maybe we'd never come home, neither."

"American husbands very good husbands," Kimi said, looking me straight in the eye.

We was back on that subject again, so I asked her what her brother did.

"He works at the Mitsui Shipping Company," she said. "Makes much money so he can have prettiest geisha in Tokyo."

All this talk about geisha girls was getting me definitely heated up. As a matter of fact, I hadn't been exactly freezing to death since I'd gone into the bath with all those ladies, so when the maid finally came and took away the dishes I told myself it was now or never. I always feel sexy as hell after meals anyway, and with this moon shining down like a madman and the samisen whispering under the balcony, I was near boiling over. So when Kimi went back into the room I followed her, yawning and stretching to get the idea across. She asked me if I was tired, and I said I was dead beat, and didn't she think we should hit the hay.

She didn't seem too keen on it, to be perfectly honest, and stood looking at the moon as if she wanted to go out and take a walk on the beach or something, but I wasn't having any more of that. I went over and finished the *sake*, then brushed

my teeth and began to fiddle with my kimono until she finally caught on.

She slid open another of these paper panels and took out two bedrolls and laid them side by side on the mats. Then she went to the basin and brushed her teeth, and before I could open my mouth to speak she was in her bed slipping down between the blankets, until I couldn't see nothing of her but the tip of her head.

I sat on the mat thinking what I should do next. I understood now what she meant when she'd said we was supposed to wear these hotel kimonos for the rest of the evening. We was meant to sleep in them, too, with the compliments of the management. They was more like plate armour. I began to see why they didn't mind couples who wasn't married sharing a room. They'd fixed it so a girl could damn' well look after herself.

Anyway, I got sore setting there, and after a while I patted the blanket. Kimi didn't budge, making out she was asleep, but I knew better, and put my head into the bag and yelled for her to come out. She came out slowly as if she was unzipping her way, and after looking at me kind of blank, she said: "Whatsmatter? I thought you were tired and wanted to sleep."

"Well," I said, taking the opportunity to get close enough to stroke her hair, "I guess maybe I don't feel as tired as I thought. I mean, couldn't we talk some and get acquainted?"

"But we are," she laughed, and disappeared again into the damn bag.

I sat there getting really sore about the way she was acting. Here we was sleeping side by side in a hotel room in Atami and with the moon shining down on us and she was locked up in this bag as if she was alone on top of a mountain. I could see she'd turned on her side, so I reached over and gave her a good slap on the bottom.

This time she came out real fast. She sat up and looked at me, not sore as I expected, but kind of sad, as if she couldn't figure out what was wrong.

"Why you spank Kimi? Why?" she asked.

I said: "Because here we are alone together in Atami by the sea and, well, we didn't come all this way just to—I mean, we came to have fun, didn't we? Didn't we?"

"I'm having fun," she said. "Why you spoil? Why you unhappy? Because we go back to Tokyo tomorrow? I don't want to go, either. But spinster girls have to work. Wish I never had to go. Wish I was married and lived in America." And back she went into the bag.

It was hopeless. I was fed up as hell, but the funny thing was you couldn't stay sore at Kimi for long because she was so damn innocent. At least, that's how I figured it. She got me so confused I didn't know what I was doing or saying. I couldn't understand her any more'n I could a crazy donkey I once owned in Bakersfield.

Anyway, I gave up and went on to the balcony. I sat there until midnight watching the moon and listening to the waves rock 'n' rolling on the beach below. Finally, when I'd cooled off some, I went back and dragged my bed to the far side of the room where I couldn't hear Kimi's breathing or smell her scent.

I didn't sleep much though, because in the middle of the night there was an earthquake. I guess it was an earthquake, because the floor under me gave a snap, like a whip being cracked, and I was tossed over on my right side, and then on to my left. I yelled to Kimi but she was buried so deep in her bedroll she couldn't hear nothing I said. I sat up, my back-side smarting, and waited for the roof to fall in, but after a few more jerks things settled down. Finally I closed my eyes and drifted off.

When I woke up Kimi was already dressed and packing. She didn't say nothing about the quake, not even good morning, and I thought she was still sore at me because of the way I'd smacked her, but then I saw she was wrapping up her clothes as if each piece was a living thing what had died, and she was taking them to the cemetery. I guess she really did feel bad about going back to Tokyo.

The maid brought tea and some bitty cold fish and sour

berries, and we sat on the balcony in silence and ate them. In spite of the bright sunshine and the sea stretching away before us to this island they call Enoshima, it was gloomy as hell. I was sore the way things had turned out, yet I wasn't too happy about leaving, neither. I'd got kind of attached to Kimi after spending two days and nights with her, and I figured once we was back in Tokyo I wouldn't get to see much more of her. I'd have to start all over again at the Ginza if I wanted to find another girl, and to be perfectly honest, all of a sudden the idea didn't appeal to me too much.

Kimi sat silent and sad-eyed like one of these little spaniels you see about, and when we'd finished she got up, grabbed her *furoshiki*, and went to the lobby. I followed her and checked out. Then we walked up the hill towards the station, still saying nothing, until just before we reached it we came to a point overlooking the sea and stopped to catch our breaths. A big pine tree cast its shadow over us, and the sea down below was so peaceful it must have gone to my head, because suddenly I didn't want to leave Atami, and I figured this was my last chance to win Kimi over and maybe get her to change her mind. I couldn't do no worse than I'd done already, and as we wasn't speaking to each other anyway there was nothing I could lose.

She was standing by this low wall looking down into the water, and there was tears in her eyes. The prettiest tears I ever seen, like dark opals cupped in her sooty lashes. I just couldn't take it any more, and walked up and grabbed her in my arms and kissed her.

I was scared stiff she'd push me right over the wall into the sea, but it didn't happen that way. She gave a little jump of surprise, and then her whole face blazed with a kind of wonder and joy as she melted against me, her arms circling my neck, her body and her lips clinging to me, sending shock waves up and down my spine because I hadn't been expecting such a reaction. And where there'd been no words between us, now I felt her lips groping for words as they pressed against mine, her whole body tightlocked against

my body, until suddenly she broke away, her hands to her face, crying as I never heard anybody cry before.

I stepped back and said: "I'm real sorry, Kimi! I guess I'm just a no good skunk, but I don't want us to go, neither. I was kind of hoping—"

"Why didn't you tell me?" she said, crying so loud I couldn't hardly hear her. "I'm so hoppy! Now I love you day and night! You never be sorry, I promise," and she went on bawling so people walking up the street turned round and gaped at us.

"I thought you was sore," I said, completely bowled over and not knowing what to make of it all.

"Not sore—hoppy!" she sobbed. "Now we don't have to catch train to Tokyo. Now I catch train in five minutes to Kuchita."

"You going home! But I thought we was going to stay here—"

"No—Kuchita. I must go home and arrange with Mamasan. You follow on afternoon train. Here, I write down time and place." She rummaged in her handbag, found a pencil, and scribbled something on a piece of rice paper. Then she slipped it in my pocket, threw her arms round my neck, and ran off up the hill.

I started to run after her, but then I got to thinking maybe it was a good thing she was going home after all. That was where she belonged, not in one of these Ginza bars. She was plumb crazy, for sure, completely nuts, and I figured I was well out of the whole mess. As for following her and meeting her family, well, I knew she was just kidding, making an excuse so she'd be sure I wouldn't never bother her again.

But I didn't feel too good, I must admit, when I heard the train come thumping into the station. I stood under the pine trees where just a few minutes before we'd been hugging and kissing, and her face was still there plain as day, like a picture hanging in the sky. I stayed and watched it for ten or fifteen minutes, then I started back up the hill to catch my train to Tokyo.

6

I SAT on the bench waiting for the train to come in, thinking things over. I wasn't too pleased about how I'd been left high and dry, with nothing to show for it. Then I figured as I *was* here I might as well stay on a bit longer, because I only had five more days before I had to fly to Hong Kong, and I thought maybe I hadn't seen as much of Atami as I ought to have. I mean there was these girls lined up back there on the street with the red lanterns, and this old tree on the beach Kimi'd told me about which was famous because a love story'd been written about it, and I also wanted to see into one of these Shinto shrines where the Japs worship their dead ancestors and the spirits of the emperors in the form of mirrors, swords, and old bones. I told myself I mightn't ever get another chance, though I knew if Mom found out I'd set foot in one there'd be hell to pay, and I mean hell, for Mom was First Secretary of our church and doesn't believe that emperors who'd spent their lives cutting off people's heads before they'd had their own chopped off and their bones picked from the pyre with chopsticks three or four thousand years ago could really heal the sick and comfort the weary, if you know what I mean, though I got an open mind, I really have.

Anyway, it wasn't ten o'clock yet, and I saw no point in

tearing back to Tokyo just to sit out the rest of the day in a stuffy hotel, so I got up off the bench, checked my suitcase in the waiting room, and started back down the hill.

I figured I'd visit the shrine first, and stopped a Jap walking alongside and asked him the way. He looked at me as if I'd dropped from Mars, then beat it on the double. I hadn't realized till then how easy it'd been wandering around the town with Kimi who spoke the language, and all of a sudden I got panicky. Then I remembered the porter outside the hotel, and asked him where it was. He told me to go up the hill again, cross the tracks, and keep going until I couldn't go no farther, and that was the shrine, on top of the mountain.

Well, after I'd crossed the tracks as he said to do, I got on to this narrow path and climbed for about an hour. Then I came to a big clump of pines where the path widened out until it reached the foot of a steep stone stairway. It took me another half-hour to climb the steps, but I didn't mind because I was real excited now looking at the rows and rows of stone lanterns on each side, sacred basins, and bell towers that finally led to a tall red and gold gate shaped like a T. I ran up the last three steps bursting with curiosity, walked through the gate, and stopped dead in my tracks.

There wasn't no shrine there. At least, I couldn't see one; just a heap of rubble and broken poles and paper cuttings and old bones and dirt laying in a heap on the ground. And kneeling in the middle of the rubble was this Jap priest dressed in a white silk brocade kimono with a black peaked cap on his head. He was moaning and groaning and clapping his hands together and bowing all at the same time, so I went up close to him thinking he was having a fit. When he saw me he threw up his hands, tears splashing all over him, then dropped them again, palms open on the ground, moaning something that sounded like "*Ah Fishing! Fishing! Kamisama otaske!*"

"Beg pardon," I said. "I'm sorry to bother you, but I come to see the shrine."

He looked at me wild-eyed, then bent his head down again and beat it six or seven times on the ground.

"Earth shake. Ginger fall down. No more Ginger. *Ah, Fishing! Fishing!*" And off he went again, groaning and clapping his hands.

So I didn't see the shrine after all. It'd fallen down during the earthquake. I was really fed up about it after the long climb up the mountain, but I guess I was lucky I'd spent the night at the hotel.

I meant to go and see this famous tree on the beach next, I really did, but somehow on the way I got lost and ran smack into the street where the prostitutes lived. They was still standing behind the fences of their bitty houses as if they hadn't been to bed all night, which must have been tough on them in more ways than one. I wouldn't have pulled up at all, honest to God, if it hadn't been to look at the shacks and wonder how come they was still standing there as proud as peacocks when the Number One Emperor, or whoever it was that looked after them, had seen fit to knock down his own shrine. It was a mystery to me, but I don't suppose it would have been to Mom, who always has an answer ready for things like that.

Anyway, as I was walking up the street looking at the girls in their kimonos standing behind the fences, I came to this little shack where there was only one girl leaning over the railing. She couldn't have been more than fifteen and was the only one on the street whose face wasn't plastered with rouge and mascara. Her hair was black like the rest, but it had a style all its own, frizzled in a kind of bobby-sock fashion, standing straight out from her head. She looked so sad-eyed and lonesome I walked over and said hello.

"Hi," she said, her small round face lighting up like a moon because I'd spoken to her and not to one of the others. "Come in, prease. Make very hoppy all day night."

"That's mighty nice of you," I said, "but I got to get back to Tokyo this afternoon."

"Prenty time," she said. "Prease, prease! Mama-san beat me if you not come in. Say I no good."

I wasn't going to believe that about her, and maybe because I wanted to prove it, or because I felt sorry for her and believed what she said, or because I was still sore at Kimi for letting me down after coming all this way, or maybe because I just couldn't stand it any longer being around these Japanese girls and not knowing what they was really like, I pushed open the gate and went in. Back of me the girls who'd lost out screamed so loud it nearly curled my hair. I felt like a prize bull who'd run off with a heifer leaving a roaring barnyard behind.

We went through the door and up some rickety stairs to a bare room where there was a blanket spread out on the floor. We'd hardly got in before an old woman with white whiskers on her chin shuffled up with a tray on which was two cups of tea, a clean towel, and a French letter wrapped in rice paper and tied with a pink ribbon and bow. She set the tray down before us, then went over and dusted the blanket and backed out, leaving us alone.

We sat down on the mat facing each other, sipping the tea. Finally the girl pointed to the package on the tray, and smiled.

"You no have to worry," she said. "I come here onry two weeks ago. You first boy ask for Chico. Thank you very much."

"Chico? That's a pretty name."

"Yiss," she said.

We was silent again, then I asked her: "Why'd you come here just for two weeks? Aren't the police closing down the houses Monday?"

"They close, but Mama-san move. Take me with her. She very smart."

"You want to go?"

"Yiss. Then maybe five, six years I save enough to buy Mama-san out."

"And then what?"

"Have my own house and teach other girls. You want more tea?"

"No, thanks."

She got up, took the tray, and put it outside the door. Then she came back and said: "You ready?"

"Sure, sure," I said, but afraid to stand up for fear I'd fall over on my face. My head was throbbing because of the hot tea, and my stomach felt as if it was back in the street screaming along with the other girls out there.

Chico smiled at me again, and I could see by the look in her eyes that she was as nervous as I was. Maybe this was the first time she'd ever been with a feller, and was afraid she wouldn't know how to act. Anyway, she took another sip of tea, then squared her shoulders and let her kimono drop off.

I got the shock of my life, I really did. She looked just like one of these schoolgirls I seen in the bath with their headmistress. She hadn't any hair under her arms, or nowhere for that matter, and her breasts looked like two little pin heads that'd been driven into a bitty stick. All I remember was I was so mad I couldn't hardly see straight, not at Chico, but at the old bitch who'd bought her, and at myself for ever coming here, but most of all I was mad at Kimi for being the cause of it, and all I could do was sit there and think how I could get even with her. But this kid was looking at me as proud as a queen bee, so I didn't know how to tell her what I felt, and I didn't want to, neither, because I was afraid she'd burst into tears or maybe jump out the window or something. So I said: "You're sure pretty, Chico, much too young and pretty for an old bronco like me." (I figured I must have seemed like that to her because I could see now she wasn't more than twelve or thirteen.)

"Don't understand, prease," she said. "You ready?"

"It's this way, Chico," I said, getting up and patting her head as if she was still in the cradle. "I got a wife and three kids, see? The oldest one's about your age and you kind of look like her, if you know what I mean. I couldn't—"

"You have wife?"

"Sure," I said. "I guess I done wrong to come here, but you was so pretty standing out there by the fence I couldn't help myself. You understand, don't you?"

She looked at me for about two minutes so I couldn't tell what she was thinking, then she smiled and nodded, and raising herself high up on her toes, she laid her cheek against mine.

"Naughty boy," she said. "You go back to wife. I find 'nother boy soon."

"Not too soon," I said. "One year, two years—"

"I find one tomorrow, maybe," she said, and put her kimono back on.

I reached in my pocket for some yen, but I came up with the piece of paper Kimi'd given me with her address on it. "*Kimi Ogata*," it said, "*Kuchita, Tokushima, Shikoku. Take train to Uno, ferry-boat to Takamatsu.*"

Well, I'd sure show her, I told myself, really teach her a lesson this time. I'd go there and surprise her and meet her stupid family and blow them all to hell. I had nothing else to do, anyway. Boy, would she faint when she saw me! I could hardly keep from laughing just thinking about it.

I put the paper back and reached in my other pocket. I took out a thousand-yen note and gave it to the kid. But she pushed it away, and said: "You keep. You nice man. Thank you prease, but I not earn it."

I put the bill back in my pocket, patted her head again, and went out the door. On the steps I met the old witch with the white whiskers. She looked at me as if I was a ghost. Then her eyes got so narrow I couldn't hardly see into them. "Bad girl?" she hissed. "No good? You wait, I fix!"

"Wonderful girl!" I said. "Best girl in Atami," and I took out three thousand yen and shoved it in her face. Then I beat it.

7

IF I'd known it was going to take twenty hours to get to this goddam island I'd never have boarded the train, that's for sure. I sat up all night while a driving rain beat on the windows. I couldn't see nothing outside and couldn't hear the music that was playing inside, so I bought a bottle of *sake* and drank myself to sleep and didn't wake up till we got to Uno, which was the end of the line.

Then I took a rickety old ferry across the Inland Sea to Takamatsu, where I caught another train to Tokushima and a bus to Kuchita. By the time I got there around eleven o'clock in the morning I was sure Kimi'd sent me on a wild-goose chase. I was about ready to murder her and kick myself all the way back to Tokyo.

When we pulled up I asked the driver if he'd ever heard of a family called Ogata. He broke into a wide toothless grin, and said: "You Mr. Elmer Hooker?"

"That's right. How'd you know?"

He grinned again and pointed to a muddy path up ahead. Then he counted on his fingers: "One, two, three, four. Four house. O.K.?" and held out his left hand.

"O.K., thanks," I said.

It wasn't much of a village, if you could call it that. There was a post office and a grocer and a bicycle shop on one side

of the street, and a candy store and restaurant and general store on the other, all made of flimsy unpainted wood. Farther on was a schoolhouse set back off the road, and stretching away in all directions rice and barley fields, with a mountain called Kotsu rising in the distance.

I picked up my suitcase and walked along this muddy path until I got to the fourth house on the left. It was the biggest house in the village and had a high, white plaster fence round it. I opened the gate and found myself in about the prettiest garden I ever seen. There was a big lily pond with an old iron lantern standing beside it, and masses of pink and white azaleas growing among the rocks, backed with hemp palms and shrubbery. Hanging down from the eaves of the tiled roof was a dozen or more little wind bells that tinkled in the breeze, making it seem cooler than it was.

I walked up and banged on the door, thinking that if the bus driver knew my name, Kimi must be expecting me. It was a tiny village, and I guess people was curious about foreigners coming there. So I figured I wasn't going to surprise her after all.

The door was opened by a maid in a kimono who fell on to her knees when she saw me, took my suitcase, then helped me off with my shoes. She led me down a long shiny passage into an airy six-mat room, where another maid was waiting to help me unpack. Then this first maid started to undress me. I slapped her hands once or twice, but it didn't do no good. She didn't say nothing, just peeled off my things, handed me a kimono, and motioned me to follow her out into the back yard where there was a small bath-house with a wooden tub full of steaming hot water.

I could see the maid wasn't going to leave, because she took my kimono off and rolled up her sleeves. I got into the tub and sat there while she scrubbed my back, arms and legs. Then she handed me a towel, and went out.

I lay there soaking in the water, not knowing what to make of it all. Through the open window I could smell the warm sweet scent of rice cooking, and heard a wild clatter

of dishes mingled with high-pitched laughter. I wondered if this was really Kimi's house, or if maybe she'd played me a dirty trick and sent me cruising all the way out here to the chief of police's summer palace, or to the mayor's mansion. She hadn't met me at the door, and I hadn't seen her anywhere about. I just didn't know what to think.

I went back into the house and put on a dark suit, then walked down the hall until I found myself in another big room with creamy white mats on the floor and a low red lacquer table in the centre surrounded by silk cushions. In front was an alcove with one of these paper scrolls hanging on the wall, under which was a vase full of pine boughs. All the doors was open and you could look over the garden to the rice fields and to the mountain beyond.

As I was standing there I heard footsteps behind me and turned and saw Kimi. She was dressed in a pale blue silk kimono with bird patterns on it, and her hair was upswept and sprinkled with cultured pearls. She looked like she'd just stepped down from the paper scroll. She was so darned pretty and smelt so fresh and sweet it was a full minute before I could bring myself to speak to her.

"Well, I got here," I said. "I didn't know if you was expecting me or not."

"Don't be silly," she laughed. "Whole village coming to meet you. Father and mother very hoppy," and she came and laid her head against my chest.

I pushed her off because with all the doors wide open I guessed we could be seen for twenty miles. I didn't know why she didn't mind to lay her head on my shoulder right there under her folks' roof when she'd never let me even walk beside her in Atami. But I was getting used to being mixed up when I was with Kimi. Still, I pushed her off, as I said, and walked to the edge of the garden.

"You look very handsome in dark suit," she said, coming up behind me and stroking my head. "You take bath?"

"Sure, thanks," I said. "But look, Kimi—I'd no idea you

lived this far off. I can't stay here. I got to go back to Tokyo and get ready to leave."

She seemed hurt, but she said: "I hoped we could stay little longer. But you do's you think best. Elmer-san."

Then in walked an old Jap with a shiny bald skull, followed by a Japanese lady with grey hair. Kimi turned and said: "Meet please my father and mother."

The old couple bowed four or five times, and I bowed because they was real nice-looking people, but I guess I bowed too low because they started bowing all over again, this time much lower than I'd done. Finally the old man said: "So sorry cannot speak. Daughter speak. We weckom. Sit, prease."

We sat round the low lacquer table, our feet tucked under us, and sipped tea which the maid brought in. The old couple sat bolt upright and talked to Kimi who translated what they said. I didn't say nothing, just listened, because I was interested in the family and the village and knew I'd never have another chance to see Japs living like this so far from civilization.

Kimi told me her father wished me well and to please excuse him for not speaking my tongue. He taught mathematics in the junior high school, and though he could read English some he'd never heard it spoken except when Kimi was clowning about the house. I was the first American who'd ever been to Kuchita, as a matter of fact, and though he'd seen one once in Takamatsu where he'd gone on business, this was the first time Mrs. Ogata had ever laid eyes on a foreigner.

I turned red at that and looked at the old lady, but she was staring down at the table as if we wasn't present. If I hadn't kept hearing her slapping her tea like it was soup I wouldn't never have believed she was there, neither.

The maid came in with some rice and fish dishes, and while we ate, Kimi went on translating. It seemed the old man was puzzled by what'd happened since the war and how different the Japanese way was from the American way. At

first he'd beaten Kimi for running off to Tokyo because he wasn't able to understand the new adventuresome spirit that'd taken hold of the young people on the island, but he was a school teacher and had read a bit about the world, and now he'd begun to realize you couldn't turn back the clock, but had to think about how to set it forward, and he guessed Kimi was the best example of this, and had given her his blessing.

Then he said he'd like me to know about the family background. The land belonged to his great-great-grand-dad, who was an ancestor of Emperor Futoku who'd been exiled to the island when the two big powers in Kyoto had had some sort of a squabble. The house was three hundred years old and the family'd always lived in it and looked after the village, seeing it was kept up nice and making sure there was always enough water to irrigate the surrounding fields. Kimi's three uncles each owned a store up the road and together they'd put up the money to build a reservoir on the high ground where the rain washed down into the river. I didn't know if what he was telling me was true or not, but I figured it was, because he looked like a good man, and while Kimi was talking I sat there thinking how in Atami I'd wondered if she was a prostitute or not, and I just couldn't hardly look at her I was so ashamed.

When we'd finished eating the old lady finally said something in Japanese, and Kimi told me: "Mother sorry we haven't more lunch, but later when guests come we have big dinner. We go now to shrine."

"You got a Shinto shrine here?" I asked her.

"Of course we have," she laughed.

I was real glad to hear it, and I wasn't going to miss seeing it if I could help it, even if it did mean I'd be late getting back to Tokyo. I told them about what had happened to the shrine in Atami and how sorry I was about the way it had looked, and they seemed real broken-up about it. Then Kimi went off to change, and her folks followed her through one of these sliding paper doors.

They came back in about half an hour, dressed in their Sunday best. The old people wore black silk kimonos, while Kimi's was a real pretty red and gold one with long sleeves that hung down to the floor and a bustle on her back, which this time she wore at the nape of her neck. She led me out into the garden to the street, and her Mom and Dad followed about twenty yards behind.

As we entered the village I saw a Jap come out of a store and look at us, then run back and come out again with ten other Japs who stood at the side of the street, gaping. They was gaping at me, I could see that, and I felt foolish as hell, I really did, like I was something from another planet. We walked on and soon the stores on both sides of the street began to spill out Japs, until the whole village was standing there grinning at us. Some waited till the old folks had passed by, then fell in behind them. I was sure glad when we turned off into a wide flagstone path and walked under one of these *torii* gates I'd seen in Atami and finally reached the shrine.

There wasn't much to it, really, just a simple wooden hut with a thatched roof supported by skinny pillars. On each side, as we walked up the steps to the sacred precincts where a priest stood, was a big iron bucket of water. Hanging from the pillars was a cluster of straw ropes and small strips of paper to protect us from evil influences, and in front of us a table stacked with fresh fruit and jugs of *sake*. Above that was a mirror and a stone, symbols of a god or emperor, probably Futoku who first came to Kuchita.

The priest looked up, saw us, and bowed, mumbling something in Japanese. I was standing beside Kimi and her folks was just behind me. I figured this priest wanted us to join in the service he was preparing, because he picked up what looked like a feather duster made of strips of rice-paper and began to wave it over our heads, chanting to himself. Then he reached for a big sheet of rice paper what had rows and rows of Japanese characters on it and read it out loud in a sing-song voice. A cold shiver ran through me,

I have to admit, thinking of Mom and what she'd have said if she'd seen me standing with bowed head before this crazy jerk who was wearing a kimono with sleeves that looked like buzzard wings and a tall black cone-shaped hat. She'd have keeled over.

But I didn't want to hurt the priest's feelings, and kept my head bowed real reverent like, until he let go again with this paper duster. Finally he put it away, went back to the table, and returned with two cups of *sake* which he held out to us. I looked at Kimi and saw she was drinking hers, so I swallowed mine, wishing as I done so he'd brought me one of the big jugs in place of the bitty cup, as I needed it so bad. Then he put the cups back, turned round, and said to us in English: "Tank you. Ceremony over. Bye."

I wanted to ask him if I could go inside the shrine and see the altar or whatever they had in there, but Kimi'd caught hold of my hand and was pulling me down the path. Then I saw that the whole village had gathered out front, cheering and waving to us. I guess Kimi was about as embarrassed as I was, because she picked up the train of her kimono and ran off down the road to the house. I followed with the folks, thinking it was more polite.

When I got back I found the servants had taken away a wall dividing the two big rooms and had prepared a banquet. There was two long lines of lacquer trays laid out on the mats reaching as far as you could see, each with a silk cushion in front of it. Kimi'd gone to change her kimono, and I stood beside her folks thinking how kind they was to go to all this trouble over me when I was going to be in the village only a couple of hours and wouldn't never see any of them again.

We hadn't been in the house for more'n a minute before the guests began to arrive. The hall filled up and overflowed into the room where we was, and out the door I could see a line all the way down the street waiting to push through the gate into the garden. The old man motioned to me to stand beside him near the door, and as the Japs came in he told

me their names, which didn't mean nothing because they all sounded alike. I bowed three or four times to each one, and they bowed back, so it took about an hour before they was all in. There was old men and old women, and a batch of girls about Kimi's age who was her former classmates in school, and a swarm of babies strapped on to the married ladies' backs. Finally when the room couldn't hold any more, everybody sat down on the cushions and waited for Kimi. At last she came in, took me by the hand, and led me to the alcove where we sat down together.

The maids started bringing the food, big bowls of rice mixed with beans, fried fish, meat, and I don't know what else. I was just getting down to using these chop sticks when a tall Jap wearing thick horn-rimmed glasses started gassing. We kept on eating, and he kept on gassing, every little while coming up with a word that sounded like *kekkon*. After a while I got curious and asked Kimi what he was saying.

She whispered that he was her old schoolmaster and was telling us how good she'd done in her classes. Then he shut up and an old woman started talking. I asked Kimi what she was saying and she laughed and told me she'd been her wet-nurse when she was a baby. She was telling us how pretty Kimi had looked even then. Then I heard the old bag use the word *kekkon*, and I asked: "What's that mean—*kekkon*? I keep hearing it over and over."

"It means marriage," Kimi said.

"Marriage? What marriage? Don't tell me *she's* married!"

"She's talking about *our* marriage, silly. Wishing us luck and safe trip to America."

I looked at her, then back at this old bag, and down at the row of stupid moon faces grinning at us, and suddenly a great light dawned on me and I broke down right there in front of everybody and bawled like a baby.



I STILL couldn't believe it, even with Kimi setting beside me on the train to Tokyo, surrounded by five *furoshikis* full of her clothes.

"I don't get it," I said. "I guess maybe you think I'm crazy, but I don't remember proposing, that's for sure."

Kimi pulled herself up tight on the seat like one of these matrons I used to see across the aisle from Mom at church.

"You kiss, meet family. Have wedding service and wedding party. You don't know you get married? You very strange man!"

"Sure I kissed you. But we slept together in Tokyo and Atami and you didn't think nothing about that."

"I sleep with father and brother and brother's friend. We don't kiss. I don't marry. Only you kiss. So we marry. What you mad about, anyway?"

"What I'm mad about! I'll tell you! You planned this whole goddam thing! You and your family tricked me into it! Innocent as a babe! I should have my head examined!"

"I think so, yes!" Kimi said, getting sore herself. "You marry girl at shrine and pretend you don't know! Why you pretend? You no like Kimi? Why you not say before you think Kimi ugly and stupid? Why you follow from police station? Why you take to hotel and then to Atami?"

"You don't know?" I bawled at her.

"Because you lonely. Kimi lonely, too. So we marry. What wrong?"

"Oh, for Chrissake!"

I could see there was no use arguing with her, so I sat back wondering what to do next. Kimi was silent, too, then suddenly she gave me this big smile, snuggled up close, and said:

"We go to America now?"

"We don't go to America. We go to England, goddam it." I didn't tell her that Mom would be waiting for us, because I couldn't bring myself even to think about what she'd say when she found out I got hitched to a Jap.

"I need passport?" she asked.

"Sure you do. You got one?"

"No. Passports very difficult in Japan. Takes two or three months."

"Oh, Jesus," I said. "We got to be on the plane in three days. We'd better go straight to the office when we get back and see about it."

"Then where we go?"

"Some hotel for a couple of nights."

"We no have honeymoon?"

"Sure we do," I said, remembering that there was some good reason for getting married even if you didn't mean to. "We go to Hong Kong. Big harbour with floating restaurants where you eat out in the moonlight. Very romantic. You like that?"

"Yes, I like," Kimi said, and settled back with a sigh.

We got to Tokyo about two o'clock in the afternoon and took a taxi to the passport office because I was real worried about what she'd said. It seemed she was right about having to wait two or three months. She had to have a birth certificate, and a paper showing why she wanted to leave Japan, and where she was going, and who was going to pay for her, and another paper showing her police record. I told the Jap

who asked all these questions that we had to leave in four days, but he just opened his big mouth and laughed.

I got real worried then, until it dawned on me as Kimi was my wife she should have an American passport same as mine, so I crossed over to the phone and called the American Embassy. I got hold of one of these vice-consuls and told him I'd married a Jap and could they give my wife a passport right away.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," he said. "We can't issue your wife a passport until she's a citizen."

"Doesn't me being one make her one?"

"No. She must first emigrate to the United States and then pass the citizenship examination."

"She can do that. She's right smart, sir," I said.

"Are you a member of the Armed Forces?"

"No, sir, I'm a civilian."

"Then your wife must obtain a non-quota visa. When she has resided in the United States five years—"

"But we're not going to the States!" I told him. "We're going to England. She *has* to have a passport, she really does!"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you," the consul said. "If you were a member of the Armed Services—"

I wasn't going to war just to get Kimi to England, and I told him so.

"Then your wife must travel on a Japanese passport," he said, and shut off.

I was pretty sore by that time, and went back to this Jap who was still standing at the counter, took out ten thousand yen, and waved it in his face.

"You have her passport ready tomorrow," I told him, "or I go to the Emperor and find out why you talk so much."

The Jap looked at me as if he'd never seen so much dough in his life. He scratched his head and said if I'd give him some yen now he'd take the chief out to dinner and see what he could do. So I gave him five thousand yen, and walked out.

We went and got Kimi's picture taken, then I figured we'd better go to the British Consul and see about visas because we was going to England to live. This nice young blond feller with pink cheeks took us into his office and gave us tea. All the time he kept looking at Kimi and back at me as if he couldn't believe we was married. But then I couldn't believe it neither, and asked him what papers we had to have. He said he'd give us visitors visas, but I told him I was going to work on Beauman-Creach's farm. He said I couldn't do that if I was American. Then I remembered I'd been born in Canada and told him so. His face lit up and he said oh, well, there wouldn't be no trouble at all. I just had to give him the information and he'd write the Home Office. It would take only a week or so to get everything straightened out because I was British. I told him I was American, but he just shrugged and said I was one of these dual citizens, and for me not to worry at all. Then I told him we had to leave in three days and couldn't wait for any papers. He took a long drink of tea and said he'd see that the papers was waiting for us in Rome, Italy, where we had to stop-over on the way. So I gave him the information he wanted, and left, thinking England couldn't be too bad a place if they had such nice accommodating fellers there.

Even though we was going to honeymoon in Hong Kong, I figured as this was our wedding night we ought to find a nice place to stay, so I asked Kimi where she'd like to go. She mentioned this Jap hotel called Fukuda-ya, but I wasn't having any more of these bed-rolls, not tonight, so we settled on a Western hotel opposite the Imperial Palace called Teito which Kimi said had real nice beds stretching the whole width of the room.

On the way we passed this big red-brick building which was owned by the Mitsui Steamship Company where Kimi's brother worked. She stopped the cab and said she had to tell her brother about how she was married and all and that she'd join me at the hotel in half an hour. So I left her there and drove off.

We passed the American Express Company and I remembered I hadn't picked up my mail since I came to Japan. I asked the driver to wait and went in. There was some bills from Bakersfield and a cable from Tonbridge, Kent. I tore it open and read:

YOUR MOTHER ILL COME HOME AT ONCE. LOFTUS BEAUMAN-CREACH.

It gave me a shock, it really did. I forgot I was married and started over to the ticket counter to make a reservation on the night plane. Then I remembered about it and knew I couldn't leave Kimi behind as she'd never get to England by herself; and if I didn't take her with me she'd sure get the cops after me and have me thrown into the jug and I'd never get away. So I figured I just had to wait three days for her passport to come through, and bought another ticket to Rome via Hong Kong, Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, and New Delhi. Even if I wasn't going to get to see as much of the world as I'd expected, I figured we could stop off for a night each time the plane came down and have a look around. And if Mom was as sick as Beauman-Creach seemed to think, maybe it was just as well we didn't get to London too soon. The shock of finding out I was married to a Jap might finish her for good.

I wired Mom I'd come as soon as I could, then went on to the hotel.

I was damn worried, but after all it was my wedding night and I wasn't going to have it spoiled if I could help it. I got the best room they had at the hotel, a real suite, with the bed set up on a dais so high you had to walk up three steps to get to it. I had this Jap boy-san bring up armfuls of flowers and together we smothered the place. Then I unpacked my things and Kimi's, and put them away in the drawers so everything'd be real nice when she came in.

But she didn't come in. I waited a half-hour, an hour, two hours. After three hours I got really wild. I didn't know what to do or where to look for her. I called the Mitsui

Steamship Company and found they'd been closed since five o'clock. I didn't know where her brother lived, and I wasn't going to call her folks on the island and scare them to death. What would they have thought? They hadn't no phone anyway, and even if they had they couldn't speak English.

The waiter brought all this food I'd ordered, with champagne from France, and spread it on the table.

"Madame come?"

"Oh, sure. She'll be along in a minute," I said.

"Open champagne?"

"Of course, what you think I ordered it for?"

He opened the bottle and poured two glasses, then he backed out looking at me as if he couldn't understand Americans at all.

I sat drinking the champagne. I drank the whole bottle, and when the maid came to turn down the bed, I ordered another, and drank that. I was goddam sore, I really was, because Kimi had got me into this mess, with Mom sick and all, and she couldn't even show up on our wedding night. But I was worried, too, because I didn't think she'd run off like that for no reason. Though I'd only known her for a couple of days, I figured she wasn't that sort. Anyway, I got to thinking about it so hard I fell off to sleep.

I woke up with the sun shining through the window. The food was still on the table, and the bed turned down, and Kimi wasn't nowhere about. I jumped up and ran downstairs to the front desk.

"You seen my wife?" I asked.

"What she look like?" the clerk said.

"Like you. I mean she's Japanese. She didn't come in last night. She send me a message or anything?"

The clerk looked real pleased, as if he was glad Kimi hadn't come in. But all he said was he didn't know nothing about it. I thanked him and went out into the street.

There was only one person I remembered who knew Kimi, and that was this chief cop at the Shimbashi station. I didn't ever want to see his face again, but as there was nothing else I could think of doing, I took a taxi back there.

He recognized me the moment I walked in.

"You in more trouble?" he asked.

"I lost my wife," I said. "She didn't come home last night."

He went over to a file leaning against the wall and looked up my record.

"You no have wife," he said.

"That's what I thought. But I got one now."

He gave me a scowl, and said: "What name?"

"Kimi Ogata. The girl who was here with me—the one you smacked."

"Saburo's daughter?"

"That's right. We got married yesterday." Then I told him about the wedding on the island and the big party they gave us. He listened, scowling.

"When you see her last?"

"I dropped her at the Mitsui Shipping Company. She went to meet her brother. She never got to the hotel. We leave for Hong Kong tomorrow."

"Why she not come hotel?"

"If I knew that," I said, "I wouldn't be standing here."

"She no like marriage?"

"She hasn't had a chance to find out. We been setting on the train for twenty-four hours. You going to find her or not?"

He kept up this scowling and I could see he didn't want to be bothered, but he must have known Kimi's father pretty well because he didn't throw me out.

"Why you marry Japanese girl, anyway?"

"Don't ask me. I didn't know what I was marrying. I mean—" He looked at me as if I was nuts, and I said: "For Chrissake! Are you going to look for her? We got to catch the plane."

Well, after more arguing he put me into a long black car and we drove off, siren screaming. We went first to the Mitsui Shipping Company, but Kimi's brother wasn't there. The secretary remembered a girl dropping in the night before asking for him, but that was all she knew.

Then we screamed off to Chiba, which took an hour. When we got there the cop couldn't find Kimi's brother's house. He asked five local cops where it was and they all seemed to know and pointed this way and that, but still we couldn't find it because there's no street signs or numbers in Japan, as I told you. We met a Jap on a bicycle who said he knew where it was, so we followed him, and then he got lost. He stopped and asked a kid who was playing in the street who said he knew the house, so we followed the bicycle that followed the kid. Then he got lost. Finally we all got out and talked it over with a bunch of fishermen we met who was coming home from work and followed behind them. Before long we had a whole string of people walking up front of the car looking for the place. If I hadn't been so damn worried I'd have split my guts laughing, but as it was I felt more like bawling, I really did.

Finally we found the house setting behind some rocks on top of a hill. It was a pretty good-sized place with a garden looking over the sea. A Japanese girl in a beat-up kimono met us at the door holding back a pack of howling kids who wanted to climb over her to get to us. The cop spoke to her, and she shook her head. Then he took out a notebook and asked her some questions, writing down what she said.

"Mr. Ogata not home for six nights," he told me. "I find out name of his friends and we go visit."

"Are those his friends?" I said, pointing to the list of names he'd jotted down.

"Yiss. Geisha tea houses. We go now. You come?"

I could see how long it was going to take us to find all these places, so I said: "I got to go to the passport office. When you find my wife bring her to the Teito Hotel. Keep me posted, see?"

"Yiss," he said. "Don't worry. We find," and he climbed back in the car and roared off.

I got a taxi and went to see the jerk at the passport office. He greeted me with broad smiles.

"Very hoppy! Passport ready! Chief like dinner very much. Prease, wife must sign. Where she?"

"She's disappeared," I said. Then when I saw his face almost drop to pieces, I told him: "I mean she can't come just now. I'll bring her along tonight or tomorrow."

"But passport one day I got! Never happen before! Never happen again!"

"O.K.," I said. "You done fine, relax," and I gave him another five thousand yen. "Hold on to it for me."

He didn't answer because he was too busy counting the money, and I left.

I picked up the tickets at the Pan American office, then went back to the hotel. I ordered a bottle of whisky and sat down to wait.

Just before lunch the cop called me on the phone.

"I find!" he screeched. "Wife left Shibuya tea house with brother one hour ago. I go now to Azabu, think maybe she there." And he shut off.

At three o'clock he called back. "Wife and brother left Miyoshi tea house ten minutes ago. Go now to Akasaka, think maybe she there." And he shut down.

Well, it went on like that all through the night until I couldn't hardly remember the places he'd been to. Finally at ten o'clock the next morning, two hours before the plane was to leave, I got a call from the Shimbashi station. He was holding Kimi's brother, but there wasn't nothing he could do about it but let him go again because Kimi wasn't with him. She'd broke loose and disappeared.

I dropped the phone and stood staring at the wall. I felt real sick about it, but kind of relieved, too, because I'd never been in such messes before I'd met Kimi, and because now I wouldn't have to tell Mom anything about the wedding. It wasn't my fault Kimi had run off, and if the cops couldn't find her they couldn't put me in the jug for leaving her behind. I was only sorry about not having known her better, and I was sore about the dough I'd put out for her passport, the suite and the flowers and all, but I chalked it up to experience and set about packing my bag.

9

IT was just wishful thinking believing Kimi had disappeared. I realized that as soon as I got downstairs and seen her standing in the doorway, her clothes looking like they'd been pulled through a wringer. I should have known she'd head straight for the hotel when she broke loose from her brother. Nothing could hold her back when she wanted something bad enough, as I'd found out already.

She threw her arms round my neck, crying and telling me how Minya'd kidnapped her because he didn't want her to leave the country. I said I guessed it was something like that, but if she wanted to catch the plane she'd better change her clothes and get packed quick, as we didn't have much time. I gave her the key to the room and she ran off upstairs.

She came down in a few minutes dressed in a tight fitting blue suit with a bitty hat stuck on her head. Behind her the boy-san dragged her five *furoshikis*. When I saw them I told her we'd have to buy her a proper suitcase because I wasn't going to tote them sacks half-way round the world. She said: "O.K., you can buy everything you want for Kimi now. We married."

I got the point, but I didn't say nothing, just hailed a taxi.

It was one of those bugs you see about for sixty yen. It veered off from the middle lane of traffic straight to the curb,

throwing the whole street into a panic. Kimi jumped in and I followed with the luggage. I got one leg in, that is, when the taxi took off. The door was hanging open and I hollered to the driver to stop, but he didn't pay no attention, just put his foot on the gas and kept it there, weaving in and out of the traffic, his thumb pressed down on the horn. I would have fallen into the gutter if I hadn't reached out and grabbed hold of this green flag that was flying from the fender and held on to it for ten or twelve blocks. We wouldn't have stopped at all, I expect, if we hadn't passed a pushcart with its axle sticking way out on one side. We caught on to this axle and climbed straight up into the air, then came crashing down sideways in a pool of broken glass. I yelled to Kimi and dragged her out of the back seat, but it wasn't until I'd got her to the curb and found she was all right that I realized I was still holding on to the god-dam flag. On it was written: "SAFETY WEEK," can you believe it!

We picked up Kimi's passport, bought her a suitcase, had ourselves inoculated at St. Luke's Hospital, then beat it to the airport.

We was late and could hear our names being bawled over the loudspeaker when we handed in our tickets. Then we went to the customs shed where the other passengers was waiting to have their bags examined, about twenty in all, Americans, French, and English, a couple of Indians with frizzy black beards, an Arab wearing a dirty pair of barrel pants and a fez on his head, and three or four other jerks who could have been Chinese or Korean, I didn't know.

We sat looking through the window at the plane warming up on the runway. It seemed awful small and I could see Kimi wasn't too happy about getting into it.

"You think plane get off ground, Elmer-san?" she asked.

"Sure it will," I said. "What makes you think it won't?"

"Too many people—too many suitcase."

"Everything's been weighed. Don't you worry."

"What if engine stop?"

"They got two engines," I said.

"What if other engine stop?"

I couldn't answer that one, so I turned and looked at this little Jap in uniform who was frisking the Arab. I hadn't seen that done before and figured maybe he was looking for dope or something. Anyway, the Arab was shaking so with fright he could hardly keep his fez on. His eyes was watering, his nose dripping, and I thought he was going to pass out. Finally the Jap moved on, frisked the others, then turned to us.

He went through Kimi's handbag, dropping her things all over the floor, grunted, and started on me.

"What are you looking for?" I asked him.

He gave me one of these black Gestapo scowls and stuck his hand into my coat pocket. I laughed in his face. Then he reached into my trouser pockets and came out with a hundred-dollar bill. He looked at it, his eyes round, then dived back in and grabbed my whole wad, which he waved in my face.

"How much?"

"Eight thousand dollars," I said.

"Where you get?"

"Bakersfield, California."

"Passport, please."

I gave it to him and he snapped through to this page which had my foreign exchange record on it.

"You bring fifty dollar to Japan. Where you get eight thousand dollar?"

"I told you. Bakersfield, California."

His eyes shrunk up like walnuts.

"You declared fifty dollar. You get rest Tokyo black market?"

"No, in California."

He grabbed my arm: "Come. We speak with chief. You big trouble. No take plane. Maybe spend two three months in *kangoku*."

"What's that—*kangoku*?"

“Prison,” Kimi said, and burst into tears.

We went to this smelly room at the end of the shed where a fat pig of a cop sat at a desk shuffling through some papers. Over his head the loudspeaker kept bawling our names. The Japs had a talk, then the fat one took the dough from the little one, and they whispered some more. The fat one never took his eyes off me, even when he counted the bills. Finally he said: “Where you get these dollar?”

“Bakersfield, California.”

“You declare fifty dollar.”

“I made a mistake.”

“You get dollar Japan?”

“California.”

“Who gave you dollar?”

“My bank.”

“Tokyo?”

“California.”

“Why you not declare?”

I was going to smack him when I saw Kimi’s face start to break up again, so I said: “O.K., I didn’t declare it. What you going to do about it? I got it in California as I said. Ask my wife, she’ll tell you.”

The Japs turned to Kimi, but I could see she didn’t have a clue to what was going on, and couldn’t answer. Above our heads the loudspeaker kept yelling for us, and through the window I could see the plane twisting and turning on the runway, its engines grumbling, and I was about to give up and let the Japs take us to the *kangoku* when I remembered what Kimi had told me to do the last time I got in trouble. I stepped back, swept off my hat, and bowed real low.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” I said.

There was a silence while the Japs stared at each other. Then they jumped to their feet, clicked their heels together, and returned my bow. While their eyes was on the floor I picked up my dough, and bowed again. We was still bowing to each other as we backed out of the gate on to the field where the steward grabbed us and pushed us on to the plane.

We got off all right, except for this trouble we had with the Arab who wouldn't let the hostess strap him in his seat. He hollered so loud she had to call the captain. When we finally did get into the air he was so scared he was sick on the carpet.

But Kimi got on fine. She clapped her hands over her eyes and held them there till we was way out over the water; then she curled up against the window with a happy little sigh as if she'd been riding in planes all her life.

After a while the hostess brought us our lunch trays and a hush fell over everybody, all except the Arab who pushed his tray away and was sick again on the floor.

I wasn't feeling too hungry after what he kept doing, and sat back thinking over what had taken place since I got to Japan, trying to get things straight in my mind. I hadn't had time before because everything'd happened so fast. I'd been in Japan only a week, but here I was leaving it a married man! I still couldn't believe it, and sat watching Kimi bent over her tray, eating her lettuce with a spoon. I guess maybe seeing her do that brought it home to me what I'd let myself in for. I mean here she was setting beside me, one bitty hand resting on my knee, and I didn't hardly know her. We was married and was going to live together for the rest of our lives: I had to look after her in health and in sickness, keep her in food and clothes, house her and all, and here I'd just found out she didn't know how to use a knife and fork! What else I was going to find out about her like that I didn't know. But the full meaning of what I done hit me so hard I nearly jumped out the window.

But then I got to wondering how *she* must have felt setting there beside me a mile up in the sky, not knowing who I was or where I came from, or where we was going, or if I could look after her. She'd left her folks and her country maybe for ever to fly off with a guy she'd only known a couple of days to a place she'd never heard of, where the people couldn't even speak her language. I figured she was

plumb crazy or had more guts than any kid I ever met. I got sniffy just thinking about it.

Then I noticed how interested she was in everything, even the sick Arab. After a while she put away her tray and asked me about the passengers, who they was and why they was on the plane, where they came from, and where they was going, and I told her what I could, which wasn't much, I have to admit.

But it made me feel kind of proud to be explaining things to her, and showing her the world, so to speak. I wished we'd been going to Bakersfield instead of Hong Kong and India, so I could have spoken from first-hand experience and showed her the valley and the farm and this Olvera Street they have in Los Angeles which is a bit of Old Mexico. All of a sudden I felt ashamed because I hadn't been to more places and met more people and read more books. I hadn't even finished my schooling because Dad needed me in the fields. I'm not crabbing, I love farm work, but it just hit me I didn't even know anything about England where I was taking Kimi to live.

But I'd read this circular back at the hotel telling about Hong Kong and how pretty the bay was, dotted with Chinese junks, and how it was a duty-free port where you could buy silk dresses and alpaca suits (whatever they was) for practically nothing. I wanted to take Kimi shopping on the island, and ride with her in one of these rickshaws through the narrow streets before we had dinner on a floating restaurant. Then we'd spend the night at the Peninsula Hotel and make up for what we'd lost out on in Tokyo because of her brother. We'd stay two nights as it was our honeymoon, then I'd have to tell her about Mom being sick so she'd understand why we couldn't stay longer.

We'd been flying for about five hours when we reached the Chinese coast and started coming down. The minute we dipped our wings and cut the engines the Arab began to howl again. Two of the passengers held him while the hostess strapped him back in his seat, and though she told him

we couldn't stay in the air all night, and had to land sometime, he kept on yelling his head off. When we swept over a lighthouse and glided down past a giant cliff with only ten feet to spare at the wing tip, then hit the ground and bounced, engines gunned to full speed again because we'd overshot the field, he stopped yelling and passed out.

We landed safe the second try and hurried to the terminal to have our bags and passports examined. The Arab was taken off in a wheel chair and we didn't see no more of him, which was a treat.

This nice Englishman dressed in a white linen suit took our passports, and while he leafed through them Kimi and I peered over his head out the window. We could see the bay stretched out before us like a sheet of blue glass under a fiery sunset, with the nine peaks of Kowloon on our right and Hong Kong rising high up across the water lit by twisting whips of light. It looked so warm and friendly after the long flight over the empty sea from Tokyo that Kimi slipped her hand into mine.

"Honeymoon island, Elmer-san?"

"It sure is. And about time, too!"

"Yes, I think so," Kimi smiled, and buried her face in my coat.

10

THIS Englishman said: "Mr. Hooker? You and Miss Ogata are travelling together?"

"That's right. She's my wife. They issued her passport in her maiden name, the stupid gooks."

"You're in transit to the United Kingdom?"

"Via Bangkok, India and Italy. We're only here for a few nights."

He was silent, then he said: "I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid your wife won't be permitted to disembark. She hasn't obtained a visa."

"Visa! Nobody said nothing to me about visas!"

"Perhaps your travel agent was unaware that Miss Ogata was Japanese, or intended to stop over in Hong Kong."

"The goddam dummies! But we got to stop here. We got to!"

"As your passport is in order, Mr. Hooker, you may disembark for twenty-four hours. Unfortunately Miss Ogata—"

"Mrs. Hooker!"

"Unfortunately Mrs. Hooker's passport isn't valid for Hong Kong."

"What you mean, not valid!"

"Your passport's valid for all countries except those listed here," he said, pointing. "Mrs. Hooker's passport is

valid only for those countries mentioned in the amendment." He read: THE CONSUL GENERAL OF JAPAN REQUESTS ALL THOSE WHOM IT MAY CONCERN TO ALLOW KIMI OGATA PROCEEDING TO THE UNITED KINGDOM TO PASS FREELY AND WITHOUT HINDRANCE. AMENDMENT TO INCLUDE ITALY.

"So what?" I said.

"As there's no mention of Hong Kong, Mrs. Hooker's passport isn't valid in the Crown Colony."

"Are you crazy? Then it's not valid in Bangkok or India, neither."

"Quite," he said with a shrug.

"Now look!" I said, taking off my coat because I was sweating like a pig. "You got to do something to help us. Get us out of here so we can go to the Jap Consul and straighten things out."

"The office is closed," he said. "And Mrs. Hooker requires a visa."

"Then we'll get a visa!"

"It would take two or three weeks before your wife's application could even be considered."

"Considered? What you mean by that?"

He tapped Kimi's passport. "Here's your trouble. I'm sorry to be so blunt. The next plane to Bangkok leaves at seven in the morning. If you wish to disembark, you may do so. Your wife will be quite comfortable in the lounge."

"Now, wait a minute! We got no visas to Thailand or Italy. How are we going to get visas if you don't let us off this goddam field?"

He opened a little notebook he was holding, studied it a moment, and said: "Japanese nationals don't require visas to Italy. Thailand and India permit transit visits without visas for a period of seventy-two hours. Now, if you'll kindly proceed to the lounge. . . ."

We went into this lousy waiting-room and sat down on a bench. It was empty except for a skinny young Chinese who was biting his nails. Kimi was in tears and I felt like breaking up the furniture, I really did.

"What's matter, Elmer-san? We no honeymoon in Hong Kong?"

"I guess not. I'm sorry, Kimi."

"We have no dinner on floating restaurant under moon?"

"Goddam it, we haven't got any visas!"

"Englishman say you can go—why not Kimi?"

"Something about the war, I guess. The Japs took Hong Kong and these limeys can't forget it."

"After twelve years they can't forget? Why people hate so? Why I need visa or passport? They think one small girl blow up island?"

"They're nuts," I said. "But there's nothing we can do about it, except I'll have to go to the Jap Embassy and try and get your passport put right before we get to Thailand. You want a sandwich?"

"Yes, please. I eat sandwich and you go to floating restaurant."

"No, that wouldn't be fair. I'll go to the Embassy and come straight back. You all right?"

"Oh, yes! Don't worry about me. I find something to do. I watch planes come down and talk to people. I like very much to talk with all kinds of people—learn maybe why everybody so suspicious of everybody else."

"Well," I said, "I better get going."

I crossed over to this bank they had in the room and changed some American dollars for Hong Kong dollars at about six to one, which I thought was pretty good. I got a hundred because I wanted to buy a present for Kimi, though I didn't want her to know anything about it. Then I waved good-bye and went out front where a couple of decrepit taxis was waiting.

I told the driver to take me to Hong Kong. He said, "O.K., ferry," and I shrugged and climbed in. As we drove off I could see Kimi through the window, blowing me kisses. She looked so small and lonesome and lost there in the shed all by herself I nearly turned back. But then I knew it wasn't

no use doing that, and I wanted to buy her something, so I sat back to see where we was going.

We went down a wide street lined with shops splashed with crimson and blue Chinese characters. On top of the shops was apartments with big airy rooms with wide steps leading up, and I thought how bright and solid the houses looked compared with the unpainted wooden ones I'd seen in Japan. But then we got to this detour and turned off into a section where the squatters lived, and I didn't like it at all. I mean I'd seen enough of it near Bakersfield at harvest time. And Dad had told me how he had lived as a boy, tramping from state to state picking cotton and thinning sugar beets, with never a roof over his head. I kind of wanted to put all that misery from my mind, but here it was again, in Hong Kong, the pearl of the Far East. The Chinese was camped everywhere, in the doorways, in vacant lots, in the middle of the street. Their trash houses was lidded with flattened tin-cans, pieces of linoleum, matting, newspapers, and I don't know what else. The menfolk sat on the curb gassing, while the women crouched over stick fires on the pavement, cooking this grey sludge. Kids ran about wild, gaping and clawing at the window of the cab as we passed. Finally we turned a corner and was back in a clean street again, which ended up at the wharf.

I paid the driver and followed the crowd through a turnstile on to a paddle ferry that was waiting. I went up front and sat down, and it was just as if I'd bought a seat in a movie. Before me was the harbour scattered with warships and liners and cargo ships and junks, and a thousand other bitty boats that scampered about like water-spiders. Across the harbour the skyscrapers of Hong Kong poked up through the evening mist, and behind, as we took off, was Kowloon and the tall bare hills of China.

When I could take my eyes from it all, I looked at the passengers crowded together on the deck. Most of them was Chinese. Some wore pointed coolie hats and cotton pajama suits, and some was dressed in bright silks and tight-fitting

cheongsams with high collars and split skirts like Kimi wore when I first met her. They was darker skinned than the Japs, with flatter noses and higher cheekbones. Some of the girls was pretty enough, but others looked like monkeys, they really did.

We passed another ferry on its way to the wharf, its two decks packed with Chinese coming back from work on the island. I remembered I'd read in the circular that the Crown Colony contained two hundred and ninety square miles and had a population of two million, or two thousand to an acre. I pictured two thousand of them having tea in our back-yard in Bakersfield and got an idea what that meant. Most of them couldn't ever leave the Colony because they was born in China and couldn't get passports. I wondered what Kimi would have thought of that: riding on this ferry every day, year after year, and never getting nowhere. It was a pretty place, but I wondered if I'd still think so after spending a lifetime in a space eleven miles long and five miles wide, looking at the same patch of water.

We bumped against the quay and everyone streamed out into a wide street and disappeared up narrow little alleys that climbed the steep side of the hill. I turned into one that was lined with tenement houses hung with colored banners and walked till I got to a cross-street crawling with buses and rickshaws. I never seen so many people in one place before, or so many stores pressed together in one block. Most of them sold silks, ivory, and jewelry, and outside the classy ones stood a guard in uniform with a loaded rifle, in case there was trouble.

I asked a cop where the Japanese Embassy was, and he told me there wasn't no Embassy, but the Consul General lived in Fu-house, on Ice House Street. I got to that all right, but it was closed. I told the Jap who answered the door that my wife was Japanese and it was a matter of life and death to see the Consul and get him to fix her passport as they'd messed it up in Tokyo.

The Jap thought this over for a while, and then said the

Consul had gone to dinner and to a play, and wouldn't be back until eleven. If I wanted to drop around then he would speak to the Consul and see what could be done. I thanked him and told him he could sure expect me all right, then went off to find Kimi her present.

I wandered around looking into the shops, trying to make up my mind what she'd like to have, and wound up back at the waterfront. Shirtless, barefoot coolies was unloading some junks packed side by side on the quay, and farther on was this big floating restaurant all lit up and ready to take off. The upper deck was crowded with people having dinner, and when I caught a whiff of what was cooking, I figured I'd eat first and go shopping later. Kimi wouldn't mind, because she couldn't get out anyway, and I had to eat somewhere, and I might never get back to see Hong Kong and a floating restaurant again.

This Chinese in a white suit welcomed me with a broad smile and charged me forty Hong Kong dollars for a ticket, which I thought was a real smart idea, making it look like we was passengers on the *Queen Mary* when we was just going to float around the bay for a while.

I chose a table close to the window and the waiter brought me green tea, then handed me the menu. It was twenty pages long, all in Chinese. It made me dizzy just to look at it, so I told him to bring me the set dinner.

We pulled out into the harbor, which was still full of life. The big ships, with clusters of tiny boats alongside them like sucking pigs against their mothers, hooted at one another and sirens screamed across the water to scatter the sampans which criss-crossed back and forth full of Chinese eating supper by lantern light. Families of ten and twenty lived inside and hardly ever went ashore. Father and mother and brother and sister-in-law was born in them, made love in them, and died in them, which must have been kind of embarrassing since they wasn't no bigger than pup-tents.

But the junks was real pretty. We passed a whole swarm of them once we'd left Hong Kong and floated out into the

bay. They was scattered all over the horizon, their big brown sails, ribbed like bat wings, bulging in the hot sticky wind. They looked like ghost ships hovering in the sky.

Then we passed some bare little islands where these purse-seine boats moved like cats' eyes over the water, luring shoals of fish with the beams of their kerosene pressure lamps. I got so interested watching them I didn't notice that the waiter'd brought me my first course; stewed pigeon eggs with bamboo shoots.

When I finished it, he brought a big bowl of shark fin soup. You couldn't see the fin sticking up out of it as you might have expected, hearing about it for the first time, but it was a real fin all right, cut up into strips, fried and then boiled. Next he gave me some stewed swabi with oyster sauce, then a bowl of mushroom soup. It took me about an hour to get through it, and I was beginning to wonder how soon we was going to get back to the quay when he appeared again with a dish of steamed garoups, followed by roast chicken, more soup, roast prawns, noodles, soup again, and rice pudding. By the time I'd finished it all I was near to being sick and real worried about getting back before eleven o'clock.

As it was too dark to see out any more, I paid the waiter and went into the saloon. The tables was filled with mah-jongg players. I stood and watched them for a while, then I felt the boat twist round and heard the engines grind to a stop. Out of the window I saw the quay, lit up like a circus, draw closer and closer.

Downstairs I was the first to reach the gangplank. As I started across it this big guy with a sallow complexion and green-brown eyes grabbed me by the shoulder.

"Passport," he said.

"Are you kidding?" I said, and pushed him away.

He stepped in front of me and shouted: "No land without visa! Show, please!"

"I went through all that at the airport," I shouted back at

him. "Goddam it, can't I have a meal without you fellers screaming for a passport?"

"Must have visa. Portugal territory."

"Portugal! You think I'm nuts?"

"Macao Portugal territory You got visa?"

"Macao! I just had dinner in the restaurant. This *is* a floating restaurant, isn't it?"

He looked at me out of his green-brown eyes and said: "This Honk Kong—Macao steamer. We stay Macao four hours, then go back. You not to leave boat. But you be all right—restaurant open ten minutes."

I could have pushed him into the harbor.

II

By the time I got back to Kowloon it was near dawn. Every shop was shut up tight, and I couldn't buy Kimi a present. There wasn't even a taxi at the wharf, so I walked over to a rickshaw where a coolie lay curled up asleep, woke him, and told him I had to be at the airport in forty-five minutes.

He lifted the shafts, tucked them under his arms, then ran like mad in his bare flat feet, never once slowing down till we got to the terminal. I felt foolish as hell setting on the red plush seat looking at his behind jerking up and down like my old mule's when he was hitched to the wagon, and I figured he must have hated my guts, but he didn't seem to, and was real pleased when I gave him ten dollars conscience money after he only asked for three.

I felt pretty bad about not bringing Kimi back a present, and stopped at the magazine stand in the hall and bought her a Chinese doll. It wasn't no bigger than my finger, but it was all they had. While I was reaching in my pocket for some change this limey who'd checked our passports and messed up our honeymoon walked in and bought himself a morning paper. He gave me a nod, so I asked him if my wife was all right.

He screwed up his eyes and said: "I wouldn't worry about Mrs. Hooker. Not one bit. She's quite capable of taking care of herself." Then he walked off.

I continued down the hall and pushed open the door to the waiting-room, wondering what he meant. Then I found out. Kimi was standing in the middle of the floor swathed in bright silks, this skinny Chinese I'd seen hanging about the night before kneeling beside her, his mouth stuffed full of pins. Every bench in the place was draped in gold and silver and blue, and standing around watching was five or six people just off a plane, grinning from ear to ear.

Kimi looked up when I came in, and waved.

"Elmer-san! Come see if you like my new dress."

"New dress!" I shot a glance at the peddler, who gave a guilty jerk of his head, dropping the pins on the floor.

"Six!" she said. "Can you believe? Mr. Kwong worked all night so I could have them before plane leaves. Mr. Kwong—this my husband. He pay you now what you ask."

Mr. Kwong slithered up on to his feet like the snake he was, and told me: "Madame velly velly kind. I say I haven't much work because I come just two weeks from Canton and she give me order. I measure and fit ten hours." He beamed. "You like?"

I was about to stuff the bitty doll I'd bought for Kimi down his throat, when I noticed this slob off one of the planes watching us. There was something about him that gave me the creeps. He wasn't too bad looking, and must have come from the States because he had a crew-cut, but his hair was paper white, like his eyes, which bored holes in you, as if they was loaded. Yet he kept smiling this thin smile which gave me goose pimples. He looked like Boris Karloff standing there waiting to carve me up, though it wasn't him, of course.

So I just said: "If you come from Canton you must be a commie. Why don't you go dress up Mao and leave my wife alone?"

"No understand," he said, giving me this shocked, helpless look. "You no likey dress?"

"Why don't you scam?" I said.

There was a sudden silence in the room, with this Karloff looking at me out of his deep white eyes, still smiling. Then Kimi came running over on her high heels which she'd taken from her bag and rapped me on the chest with her fists.

"Now you stop, Elmer-san!" she said, real crazy like. "Mr. Kwong has four children and all live and work in street. I don't care where he comes from—he has to eat. I don't want dress—let him keep dress—but you pay. I told him you pay because you my husband, *ne*?"

I was goddam sore at her for making a scene in front of the passengers. Maybe it was because deep down I was ashamed of having bought her nothing but this bitty doll when she'd gone and got herself fixed up with a trousseau all on her own, or maybe I just didn't understand why she was making so much fuss, but whatever it was there was nothing I could do about it with old Karloff standing there hugging his briefcase and grinning at me, so I took out my wallet and gave Kwong all the Hong Kong dollars I had left. Kimi raised herself on her tiptoes and kissed me such a smack on the cheek I couldn't hear what the peddler said, but he must have been satisfied, for he bowed a couple of times, swept his mess off the floor, and ran out. By the time I'd put my wallet back in my pocket the passengers, including Karloff, had disappeared, and Kimi'd run away to the ladies' room to change.

It took us about five hours to get to Thailand. We didn't talk much because I was fed up with how things had turned out in Hong Kong, and I wasn't going to tell Kimi how I'd mistaken the Macao steamer for a floating restaurant, that was for sure. Nor was I feeling too happy about flying over the South China Sea where if we came down we'd sure be caught and held as hostages and brainwashed or whatever

it is the commies do when they get hold of you. And I was worried about Kimi's passport which wasn't valid for Siam, and didn't know if they'd let us disembark or not. But I heard one of the passengers say the Thais was a real friendly, happy people, just like kids, so I crossed my fingers and sat back hoping for the best.

Soon, under our wing, I saw a low plain creep out of the sea, then a wide river winding through green jungle. Then we came down low over a patchwork of small canals dividing mud huts and thatched roofed villages surrounded by watery rice fields like I seen in Japan. In a moment we bumped down on to a long runway and stopped before the terminal.

We climbed out and was hit by a hot wind that nearly burnt the hair off my head. I could hear the rubber soles of my shoes sizzling like bacon frying on the concrete walk. I'd never felt such heat, not even in Bakersfield. Kimi gave me a look as if a building had fallen on her, and we ran for the gate.

I was beginning to get panicky every time I got near a terminal, after what I'd been through, and when I saw a long queue outside, I figured we wasn't going to have it any easier this time. After waiting ten minutes we was led dripping into a room where a small dark-skinned man in a brown shirt and shorts was jabbing each passenger in the arm with a needle. He never once changed the needle or even wiped it off. A hatchet-faced woman who was ahead of me in line started screaming that she was Baroness von Hestein and that the German Consul was supposed to meet her; she wasn't going to be touched until he arrived. But while she was doing all this yelling the doctor pricked her, and she was carried out bawling that she'd have him hung.

When it came to my turn I asked the doctor what he was doing and why, seeing we'd been inoculated for everything in the book before we'd left Tokyo, including the plague.

"Germ," he said, waving the needle.

"What kind of germ?"

"Don't know. But caused five deaths one week."

"Now wait!" I said. "We may not get into the country. I'm not going to be jabbed for some goddam germ you know nothing about until I get my passport checked." I could see the passengers lining up in the next room, so I said: "I'll be back in a minute."

Well, he wouldn't let me pass, and jabbed me in the arm while I was trying to get through the door. After that there wasn't nothing for Kimi to do but to be inoculated too, then we moved to the next office.

We was greeted by the immigration officer, who smiled and stamped my passport. When he came to Kimi's, his smile disappeared. I looked round for the waiting-room where Kimi'd have to spend another night, and was about to tell him I knew her passport wasn't valid in Siam, but couldn't he help us, when he said: "Not good picture, is it?"

Kimi winced. "No, only twenty yen."

The officer looked me up and down as if I was the cheap skate responsible for the goddam picture, then said: "Permission to disembark granted provided lady has new photograph taken before twenty-four hours. Address?"

"We got no booking."

"Oriental Hotel," he said, winked, and turned to the next passenger. He hadn't even noticed Kimi's passport was no good.

We picked up our bags at the customs and went down this long hall to where a big American Cadillac was waiting at the curb. This was more like it, I told Kimi, and was about to help her in when I heard footsteps behind us and five Thai government officials in uniform came bounding towards us. In their midst, his bare head sticking up a foot above the others, was a stocky, broad-shouldered old guy in a white linen suit, wearing wire-rimmed glasses. They didn't look right or left, just climbed into the Cadillac and drove off. It wasn't until they was out of sight that I turned

to Kimi and said: "For Chrissake! That was John Foster Dulles! What's he doing here?"

Hidden behind the Cadillac was this muddy green bus waiting to take us to town. It was already full, but we sat for half an hour in the baking heat swatting mosquitoes until another plane landed and ten more passengers got in. Then we bumped off down a narrow pocked road that stretched as far as you could see, crammed with beat-up American cars and wobbly wooden carts drawn by cattle with humps on their backs. One side of the road was lined with banana trees and bo trees and mangoes, and on the other side ran this ditch they call a *klong*, full of stagnant water and reeds. On the other side of the *klong* was a row of thatched huts on stilts, swarming with naked kids half in and half out of the ditch, some washing clothes, some picking reeds, some relieving themselves, and some fetching the water to drink. It was real interesting to see how these people lived, and I turned to Kimi to find out what she was thinking about it all, but she was watching the passengers in the bus.

The Baroness was bobbing up and down on the back seat talking to everybody and to nobody at the same time, telling how she was a Baroness and how she'd get the Consul fired because he hadn't met her in his car. It was the first time she'd ever ridden in a bus, she said—"this ignoble vehicle", she called it, and hid herself so she couldn't be seen through the window. Then there was this Frenchman with a beret drawn over one ear kissing a blonde dame who might have been Brigitte Bardot. I don't know, because I couldn't see nothing of her but her face. And there was this teddy boy who'd got his drain-pipe trousers caught in the door and was trying to attract the attention of the driver by stamping on everybody's luggage, and a rabbi robed in crow black, his nose buried in a book, and two gloomy Australians dressed to the teeth in stiff collars and grey homburgs, and a young Vietnamese girl sitting by herself up front crying into her ratty skirt, and behind the wheel,

almost hidden under a big palm-leaf hat, the little Thai driver, who could hardly see over the dashboard, singing at the top of his voice as if we didn't exist.

They looked like a crazy lot to me, but watching Kimi, I couldn't help wondering how they must have seemed to her. I mean this Frenchman necking in public, and this guy in a zoot suit, and the rabbi and all. Her eyes was as big as plates, but she wasn't laughing none. She didn't look disgusted neither. She was watching them like a cat, seeing right through them and out the other side, where it seemed she was keeping a kind of mental notebook to jot down how she felt about each one. She seemed more confused than anything else.

Finally we crossed a humped bridge over a *klong* and was in the city, dodging about amongst cycle-rickshaws and sam-lors and big American cars that looked real silly in the narrow streets. Most of the houses and shops was two stories high, painted apricot and blue. You could smell the bitter stink of opium floating down from the open windows as we passed. Then we pulled up in front of the Trocadero Hotel, and everybody climbed out.

Across the street was a big sign pointing to the Oriental Bamboo Bar, so we carried our bags over there and walked down a narrow lane to the front entrance, which swarmed with cycle-rickshaws waiting for a fare. One of the owners was a girl dressed in blue jeans and a flimsy red blouse wide open in front. She looked up as we passed, and I thought she was real pretty, almond-eyed, with a gold orchid stuck in her hair. She didn't look at Kimi, just at me.

"You want ride to Grand Palace? Temple of the Dawn?"

I shook my head, but she said: "I wait. When you need ask for Muan."

Kimi was pulling my sleeve, so I followed her up the steps into the hotel. There she dropped her suitcase, and cried: "Elmer-san! Look!"

In front of us was this horseshoe bar crowded with Amer-

icans and Thais having drinks, and on our right a flight of blue stairs, carpeted in bamboo matting, leading to an open landing framed in white archways covered with creepers. On our left was a big lounge full of red armchairs, a stone terrace, and a green lawn that ran right down to the edge of the Menan river, flowing past in a wide shining glory. Above, the bedroom veranda, screened from mosquitoes, hummed with the cool sound of fans.

I looked at Kimi, and grinned. We was “home” at last.

THE clerk at the desk said: "Have you reservations, sir?"

"No, we didn't bother about that. But the immigration officer at the airport told us to come here. We like it fine."

He gave me this wan smile, and said: "We have no vacancy. This S.E.A.T.O. summer session. You not find room anywhere in Bangkok."

"Are you kidding? Where we supposed to sleep? In the street?"

"Not permitted unless you own shop. Then can sleep in doorway. Excuse, but suggest Saen Sook Saen Sabai."

"What's that—one of the forty thieves?"

"Seaside resort one hundred kilometres away."

"Thanks, but we don't want to go to any seaside resort. We haven't got time, and we want to see Bangkok."

The guy shrugged and turned his back. Kimi said: "Very strange places we go, Elmer-san. Nobody seem to like us. Guess we never have honeymoon or chance to make child."

The clerk swung round and stared at us, so I drew Kimi aside and told her to quiet down.

"You want people to think we just got married?"

"But we just did, Elmer-san."

"Well, you don't have to broadcast it all over town. And what's this about having kids?"

"Don't you want child?" I could see she was going to bawl at any minute.

"For Chrissake! How do I know! You got the cart before the horse. First we got to find some place to lay down."

"Yes, Elmer-san. Where?"

"Don't worry. I'll find us a bed even if we got to share it with John Foster Dulles."

That quieted her, so I picked up the suitcases and went out to the alley. This girl who called herself Muan was leaning against her cycle-rickshaw, waiting for us. I'd forgotten about her, but Kimi hadn't. She gave Muan one of these cloak-and-dagger looks that would have cut me down to the ground, but the girl didn't pay no attention, just swung her rickshaw across our path and asked me again if I wanted to see the Royal Palace.

"No," I told her. "A hotel room. Know where we can find one?"

"You not stay at Oriental?"

"All booked."

"Well, I try," she said, and picked up our bags.

We got into the rickshaw, the bags piled on top of us, and Muan climbed on to the cycle. The way she done it, though, you'd have thought she was a ballet dancer, with one leg stiff and her toe pointed, the other curled underneath her until she fluttered down on to the seat like a dying swan. Then she placed her bare feet on the pedals, tucked the orchid into her hair, and sailed off with us down the New Road.

Kimi was so sore she wouldn't speak to me, but I was fed up, too, because nothing seemed to go right for us. We stopped at the Trocadero Hotel, but the doorman waved us on with his thumb. Then we went to the Princess, but they didn't have a room, so we went to the Park, where I guess Mr. Dulles was staying. The lounge was knee-deep in old diehards setting about in their shirtsleeves, gassing. Then

we went to a big hotel on a street I couldn't pronounce, then to the Metropole, and that was all the hotels they had in Bangkok, Muan said.

I didn't know what was going to happen to us, I really didn't. Beside being worried as hell, I was goddam embarrassed setting there beside Kimi as if we was King and Queen Tak Sin jerking through the traffic behind this faun who was practically naked to the waist. As a matter of fact, I figured she must be a tart, because everybody seemed to know her and bawled out her name and waved to her like mad at every street-crossing. It made you feel we was pickups on our way to her private brothel, or to an opium den.

Anyway, I'd just about had all I could take when we came to this hotel with the paint peeling off it called the Siam. I yelled to Muan to stop. She pulled to the side and said: "Not for tourists. No running water or screen on window. You not like."

"We got to like it," I said, and jumped out because I could hardly swallow I was so hot and choked up with dust, and Kimi looked like she was going to burst into flames at any moment.

The Thai manager, a kid who'd never grown up, said we could have a room for one night. That was all I wanted to know, and called to Kimi to come in. Then I changed some dollars for these ticals they use in Siam and went to get the suitcases and pay Muan what we owed her. But she wouldn't let me give her the dough. She said: "Pay when you leave. I look after you till then," and she went and lay down under a tree.

The room wasn't the best I ever seen, not by a long shot. There was a couple of bamboo chairs and a sagging bed under which was a spray-gun to kill the insects. Only it hadn't been used much, I could see, because there was lizards climbing all over the walls, and a big bow-legged beetle walking across the sheet on his way to visit under the pillow. There was a wash-bowl half-filled with dirty water, a bamboo dresser, and one window which was used as a

kind of airplane for the mosquitoes that zoomed in and out like Boeing 707s on their way to the muddy *klong* below. I looked at Kimi, expecting to find her in tears, but she was unpacking her suitcase and humming a tune—which bothered me, I have to admit, knowing how the Japs feel about cleanliness and all.

“You think it’s O.K.?” I asked her, knocking the beetle on to the floor.

“Oh, yes. You no like, Elmer?”

I hadn’t ever heard her call me that before, just Elmer, in that tone, and I got real worried because I didn’t want nothing to go wrong now we’d finally found a place to stay. As a matter of fact, as lousy as the room was, I was damn’ glad to have it and to be alone with Kimi at last.

“It isn’t the Ritz,” I said. “But we got nowhere else to go.”

Now that the time had come, with Kimi acting so strange, I began to feel kind of peculiar myself, not too sure how I should act, if you know what I mean. I’ve never been exactly timid about sex, usually it sweeps up on me like an army with banners, but watching Kimi’s back turned to me so defiant like, gave me the jitters. So I asked her: “You want a drink?”

“No. You go drink with Muan,” she said.

“What you talking about—Muan!”

“You like Thai girl, *ne*?”

“Are you crazy? Is that what you’re sore about?”

“You think she pretty, *ne*?”

“I don’t think nothing. And if it’s this room that’s got your wind up we’ll go find somewhere else.”

“Why Thai girl wait for you Oriental Hotel—and now here?”

“She wants a fare.”

“We take ride—if she need fare so bad why she not accept pay?”

“She wants to wait.”

“So she can meet you?”

“So she can get another fare. For Chrissake! They’re

just kids, these Thais. You heard what the passenger from Hong Kong said."

"Very pretty keeds," Kimi said, unpacking.

"They're happy-go-lightly. They don't think too much about dough. She's asleep out there under a tree."

"You want to sleep with her under tree?"

"Goddam it, Kimi, I sure will if you don't stop talking like that! This is our wedding night, remember? Or you forgot because it's been so long ago?"

She turned round, then, and looked at me, and there was tears in her eyes. I wanted to rush over and take her in my arms, but I was really sore the way she'd cut up for no reason, and as she didn't make no move, I didn't, just stood there glaring out the window.

When I didn't hear no sound out of her, I turned back and saw she was pulling more bitty things from her bag: a pink bra, a hairbrush, a white silk kimono scented with gardenias, and a pair of blue panties. I sank into a chair and watched her, giving up the idea I suddenly got of going downstairs and getting drunk, because I couldn't take my eyes off her or what she was doing.

A pair of nylons came next, some pearls, and a blouse, and then a big hunk of stone which she unwrapped and set on the dresser. I looked at it, and almost fainted. It was a goddam Buddha!

It was so unexpected I'd have dropped dead laughing if it hadn't been for this feeling I had that Mom was standing behind me, looking over my shoulder. I couldn't ever let Mom see that crazy idol, and I was about to grab it and throw it out the window when Kimi crouched down before it, tears streaming off her face, and started talking to it in Japanese. I could really feel Mom's breath on my neck then, and I was just going to give Kimi hell when she got up again, wrapped the Buddha in her nylons, and put it back in her bag. Then as if she'd cleansed herself of all the lousy things she'd been saying and thinking about me and Muan, she ran over and threw herself down on my lap.

I figured this wasn't no time to start an argument about graven images—things was difficult enough—so I kissed her and felt the quick response of her lips against mine, as I'd felt the warm clasp of her hand ever since we'd left Japan.

I didn't know if she could make love good or not, though I was going to find out about that right away, but I did know that without saying much or without even knowing the language, she'd made me feel we was partners. I can't explain it exactly—I'm not too good at expressing things like that—but whatever Kimi did or didn't do like the girls I'd known back home, she sure could make you feel you belonged to her and she to you, whether you liked it or not. I don't mean this roller-pin routine—she had her own way of making you feel it. You knew she wouldn't never raise a finger to stop you doing what you wanted, but if you did go out and do it, you knew goddam well she wouldn't be waiting for you when you got back. I mean, there wasn't no question of how or why we'd got married, or if the marriage would last a week or a million years. We was married and that was all there was to it, and because she felt that way there wasn't no room for you to feel any different. You just took it for granted like she did, and didn't think about it no more. Not when you was with her, anyway.

She was looking up at me with these shining black eyes, and I knew she wasn't any more conscious now of the hot crummy room than I was. We was outside in some cool green field away from everybody, about to have our time together, and when I looked at her I could see my own wolfish thoughts reflected in the pleasure on her face, and in the closeness of her body.

But when I took her in my arms she held my hands and said: "Wait, my husband. You forget."

"Forget?"

"Please not be angry. I married woman, *ne*?"

"Sure you are."

"How you know? How other people know? How I know?"

"You'll know plenty in a minute," I said.

She squirmed free, laughing like these little bells I'd heard tinkling under the eaves of her family's house.

"I must look like bride," she said. "And feel proud so I can love my husband proudly, and not fear the brightness of his gaze."

"What's the matter? You got sunstroke?" I said.

She held out a hand, like a petal of a flower.

"Ring, please. On third finger." She pointed. "Here."

"Oh, Kimi! I'm so sorry," I said. "I'll buy you one tomorrow. A real gold wedding ring."

"No, before honeymoon. Come," she laughed, and pulled me out of the chair.

If it hadn't been Kimi, so goddam crazy and all, I'd have blown my top. Setting there with her warm weight on my lap, her soft breasts pressed against my chest, her silky hair brushing my face, I was ready to carry her to the bed with a cry of hosanna when she hauled me out of the room.

And led me moaning into the glaring sunshine again, where Muan was waiting.

Kimi paid no attention to her at all. She lifted her chin and walked past the girl as if she didn't exist. I could see she was real mad, but she wasn't going to show it now that she'd been absolved by old Buddha, because if she had shown her true feelings she'd have had to go back and have it out with him all over again. So she sailed off down the street, never once looking back, which was a good thing, because she didn't see Muan climb on to her cycle, turn it around, and come up behind us, trailing her empty rickshaw two feet from our behinds.

13

BUT when we drew up suddenly at a cross-road, the rickshaw slammed into us, and after an argument in which Kimi stood aloof, as if she'd never seen Muan before, we climbed in with the understanding we was to be taken to the best jewelry store in Bangkok.

We reeled down the New Road past these old open-sided yellow streetcars with their clanging foot-bells, and turned off across a waterway arched with shady trees, then stopped before a high wall.

"Royal Palace," Muan said.

"We don't want to go to any palace," I said. "We want a jewelry store."

"Palace very pretty," Muan said, and swung her leg over the cycle bar, meaning we was to go in whether we liked it or not.

I looked at Kimi and could see she was interested, as she was interested in most anything that was new and strange to her. So I climbed out and took her hand and led her through the gate.

We stopped, completely bowled over.

It was just as if we'd entered the world of Oz. There was this big paved courtyard stretching for two miles along the river plastered with temples of glistening marble and porce-

lain, green and peacock and scarlet shrines guarded by scowling giants and demons, gilded halls with snakes curled on the gabled roofs, and everywhere these pagodas like giant suppositories, pointed at the sky.

I followed Kimi from one shrine to another, packed with images of Buddha. I could see she felt right at home. In one shrine there was a walking Buddha, and in another a sitting Buddha, and in another frescoes of the tortures of Buddha's hell, and in another about fifty standing Buddhas, and in another a piece of bone of Buddha himself they found in India. Then there was this emerald Buddha which wasn't emerald at all, but jasper, setting high up on a gilt throne, dressed in clothes studded with rubies which they changed every season, and a reclining Buddha that looked like a battleship in dry-dock, it was so big. I never seen so many graven images before, and though it gave me a shock I couldn't help but be interested, though I wondered what old Buddha himself would have thought about these pink demons and blue cows and yellow monkeys set up there in his name. I never did know much about him, except that he was a simple guy who liked to sit under a tree they call a Bo in India, talking to himself, but I guessed if he'd walked through the gate unexpectedly as we done and seen what we seen, he'd have had a fit.

Every time we got to one of the images Kimi clasped her hands and gave a little nod, so her head was bobbing up and down practically the whole time. If she'd had her way she would have spent the night in the courtyard, so after she'd gone and bowed to a white elephant by mistake I took her hand and led her back to the rickshaw. I wasn't feeling too good anyway, spending so much time in the hot sun, and I wanted to get hold of a ring and beat it back quick to the hotel.

We bounced along the New Road past stores that sold Thai silks and lacquer ware, bronze and embossed silver, raffia hats and snake-skin bags. Then we got to a section called Sampeng where mostly Chinese and Indians lived. We kept on going till we came to Ban Moh Road, and got out.

As far as you could see there was nothing but jewelry stores lined up, one against the other, jampacked with silver belts and gold watches and rings loaded with precious stones.

We went into the first store and looked about. We couldn't hardly find a wedding ring in the blaze of so many jewels. When Kimi finally did see one and slipped it on her finger it looked lost up against the others. I remembered how I'd only bought her a bitty doll since we met, so I picked up this big sapphire that was setting in a glass case all by itself and asked the chink who was waiting on us how much it cost.

"Five hundred dollar," he said, polishing it like mad.

"Too much," I told him. "We got a long way to go to get home."

"You buy—cost twice in America."

Kimi was looking at it, wide-eyed, so I shrugged and went over to the money-changer at the back of the store and paid him. I knew I shouldn't have done it because we had to go to Burma and India and Pakistan and Italy before we got to England. Anyway, I bought it and put it on her middle finger because the stone was too big for her third finger. She held it up to the light so you could see this big star shining out of it, and then she looked at me without saying nothing, but there was such happiness in her eyes I knew how she felt all right, like a kid who'd been given her first doll by Santa Claus. Then she slipped her hand in mine so we could both keep seeing the star shining as we went out into the street.

My head was aching so bad I asked Muan where we could find a chemist. She drove us down a couple of narrow streets and stopped near a section they call Thieves' Market, and pointed to a building at the end of the block.

Kimi and I got out and walked past shops full of Chinese curios. We glanced in the windows and saw all kinds of trinkets and carvings, then rows of open doors leading to dusty floors stacked with junk: old clothes, broken furniture, bedding, bicycle wheels, tools, flower-pots, rusty nails and I don't know what. The street was jammed with coolies

walking back and forth in dark sarongs and palmleaf hats, while children begged at the curb, or lay on mats or sacks in the shade of the doorways, sleeping.

Before we even got to the chemist we could hear some kid bawling his head off inside. We opened the door and went over to the counter, but there wasn't nobody to serve us. Behind the counter was another door leading off to where this kid was screaming.

On each side of the counter stood a tall cabinet with deep drawers labelled in Chinese characters. While we stood there wondering what to do, an old guy with white whiskers paddled in and pounded on the counter. After a minute the chemist, wearing a dirty white coat, came out of the room where the kid was yelling, bowed, and took the old man's order. He went to the cabinet, opened one of the drawers, and returned with a brown paper package on which he wrote something in Chinese. The old man took it, dropped some ticals on the counter, and left. The chemist turned to us.

"Please?"

"I want some aspirin," I said.

He smiled, showing a row of bright gold teeth. "Solly. This Chinese pharmacy. What wrong?"

"Headache," I said. "Too much sun."

"Ah!" he said, and trotted over to the cabinet again. He took out another brown package and laid it on the counter in front of me. "Put in tea. No more ache."

"Thanks," I said. "How much?"

"Twenty ticals."

I paid him and he went back through the door. As soon as he disappeared the bawling started again, like someone was in real agony. I turned to Kimi, but she'd walked over to the cabinet and was studying the Chinese letters on the drawers.

"You can read that?" I asked her.

"A little. Some characters same as Japanese."

"What'd he give me—from that drawer?"

Kimi read: "Cobra."

"*Cobra!* You're kidding!"

"Cobra bile," she read. "You know what is?"

"It's a goddam snake!" I shouted, and dropped the bag on the floor.

The chemist came back, looking annoyed.

"Something else, please?"

"There sure is!" I said. "What you mean giving me a snake to put in my tea!"

He closed his eyes as folks do who've lost patience, and said: "Chinese cure very good cure. Many Western customers come for help."

"I bet they do!"

"Excuse. I show." He went over to the cabinet where Kimi was and pointed with a long opium-stained finger to one drawer after another. "Jasmine flower, make baby sleep. Bone from monkey boiled in water, velly good tonic. Gall stone from ox, cure bad cough."

Kimi was looking at him as if she was going to be sick, but I could see he was real serious about what he was telling us, so I listened.

"Rhinoceros horn brings down fever, because rhinoceros like water, which gives cool feeling. Snake cures rheumatism as well as headache, because snake move fast and help patient to do so. Bone of tiger good for T.B., but expensive—sixty ticals one ounce. Fungus where milk from tigress has dropped, cures appendix. Fungus from inside of wooden coffin opposite mouth of corpse, heals kidney."

"Thanks," I said, "but I guess we won't buy anything more today. As a matter of fact, you can have your goddam snake back, and keep the change."

He shook his head, real hurt.

"You make mistake, gentleman. Western doctor use knife on patient, take out flesh and bone. Chinese doctor not use knife, and put bone back. Only instrument pestle and chopper, needle and herbal rod."

"Needle?"

"When nose bleed Western doctor open belly to see what wrong. Chinese doctor pricks thumb and stop bleeding because vein near nail is connected to lung and lung to nose."

"And what you do with the rod?"

"Come, I show you."

He took us behind the counter, then through the door into a dark room where the only window was boarded up. Stretched out on her tummy on a plank table screaming her head off was this skinny little Chinese girl in pigtails, stark naked. Standing by the table holding a candle was an old witch dressed in rags, her bare feet caked with mud.

Kimi gripped my arm; I could feel her nails biting into my skin.

On the table was a china bowl heaped with hot coals. Stuck in the coals was this glowing herbal rod the chemist was talking about. Half-way up the kid's back was a string of Chinese characters which he'd burnt into her flesh. The table was wet with her spit.

The chemist picked up the smoking rod and the kid's screams rose until they ate into the wall. He bent over the table and cut another character on her buttock. I could smell her flesh roasting as he worked slowly and deliberately, explaining: "Very good cure for T.B. Bone of tiger good, too, but Mrs. Yu not have sixty ticals."

He paused a second to poke the rod back into the coals, and then I don't know what happened, except all hell broke loose. Kimi snatched the kid from the table, knocking the coals on to the floor, screaming at Mrs. Yu as she did so. I caught a few words like *baka* and *kangoku*, and then she had the kid on her lap and was kissing her and trying to stop her from crying, and the chemist was picking up the coals from the floor, and Mrs. Yu was slapping Kimi and trying to snatch the kid away. I walked into the mess and held the old witch off with the back of my hand, yelling to Kimi to mind her own business or we'd be tossed in the clink or roasted ourselves. But she held on to the kid, still telling the old hag off in English and Japanese and Chinese

and any language she could think of. Then she picked the kid up and carried her out the door and into the street. Some papers had caught fire on the floor so the chemist didn't come after us.

On the pavement we was surrounded by curious Thais and Chinese and Indians and tourists who was pouring out of the Thieves' Market. Kimi still had hold of the naked, bawling kid, and was telling Mrs. Yu in English she wasn't going to give her up unless she promised never to go into the pharmacy again. The old witch held her hands up to everybody in the street, talking like mad in Chinese, and pointing to the kid's narrow chest and bony ribs, but Kimi said: "*Baka!* Baby-chan needs *food*. She's *byo-ki*—sick!"

The woman nodded and waved her arms again, frisking herself to show she understood, but that she didn't have no ticals. I was getting embarrassed, I really was, and started to pull Kimi away, when I looked up and got the shock of my life. Standing right there in front of me, smiling his goddam twisted smile, was Boris Karloff, his briefcase gripped in his hand. He didn't say nothing, didn't even let on he'd seen me, though I knew he had because he was watching Kimi, who was next to me. It made me kind of sick in my stomach to see him there, I don't know why, maybe the shock, or maybe because I was feeling so lousy anyway.

I stepped up to Kimi and was about to drag her away, when she snatched off the sapphire ring I'd bought her and shoved it into the old bag's hand. A murmur ran over the crowd, like these noises you hear in church, and then everybody went silent as a grave while Mrs. Yu stared down at it, and back at Kimi, who said: "You buy food, *ne?* *Food!*" and walked off, leaving a long silence trailing behind her.

I ran after her, and bawled: "Kimi! What you think you're doing!"

She didn't answer, just beat it down the street to the rickshaw and climbed in.

I was so mad I tried to pull her out again so we could go back and get the ring. Then I saw that the woman and the kid had disappeared. Only old Karloff was standing there in front of the pharmacy, looking at us. So I got in and Muan pedalled off.

"For Chrissake!" I said. "Why'd you give her the ring—throw away five hundred bucks!"

"I don't want it," she said, and burst into tears.

I could see she was lying, that she was real sorry to lose the ring, and I could understand why she'd done it after seeing what the kid had been through, but I was getting worried the way she was throwing money around, and didn't try to quiet her, just let her set there and bawl because it was her own goddam fault, and she'd have to learn that dough didn't grow on trees.

But I guess she wasn't thinking only about the ring, because when she'd stopped bawling and had blown her nose, she said: "Why people so stupid? I don't understand."

"You don't have to understand," I told her. "These guys have their own way of doing things. You shouldn't have butted in."

"Somebody must. If nobody helps stupid people, how they learn?"

"That's their look-out."

"I don't believe. Race must understand race or people will always keep old thoughts. China shut door on world. Japan throw door open, and learn from other countries. I learn. Fly Hong Kong and Thailand and soon Burma and Italy and England. I like airplane very much. Help bring people together."

"Well, you won't get no farther than this town if you go on spending like you done," I said.

"I'm sorry, Elmer-san. But you give ring to Kimi, *ne*?"

"Sure, but—"

"If I very silly, I no ask you for any more ring, promise. I learn lesson, *ne*?"

"I hope you done just that," I said.

“But I not silly today. Did right thing, so you buy new ring for Kimi sometime later. O.K.?”

I shook my head and said nothing, because we was pulling up to the hotel, and I wasn't going to get into any more arguments with her, not today.

14

As we was passing through the lobby the little Thai manager ran up to me, his hands shaking, and said: "Mr. Hooker—American Express call three times. Want you come office right away. They ring every hotel in Bangkok."

"Oh, Jesus!" I said. "Seems like we can't set down for a minute."

"That's all right, Elmer-san," Kimi said. "You go and I be ready when you come back. I take bath and scrub room and change sheet."

"The hell with it," I said. "You got to go to the Jap Consulate and get your passport fixed so it's valid for Burma, India, and Pakistan. Take a taxi. Here," and I gave her a wad of ticals. "And don't give it all to the driver! You got to pay to have your passport put right."

"Can't I go tomorrow, Elmer-san?"

"We may have to leave tomorrow. I expect it's a wire from Mom. She's ill."

"Oh! I didn't know. You never speak to Kimi about your mother. Never knew you had mother."

"Sure I got one. I just haven't had time to tell you about her. We'll talk tonight. You run on now. I'll take the rickshaw. Meet me here in an hour."

“Yes, Elmer-san. I promise.”

She went back into the street, and after I seen she got off all right, I told Muan to take me to the American Express Company, fast.

It was just round the corner on the New Road. I pushed open the glass door and walked to the counter where a blond American in a Thai silk shirt was standing shuffling through some airplane tickets. He looked up and said: “Can I help you, sir?”

“I’m Elmer Hooker. You want me?”

“Oh, Mr. Hooker, we certainly do! We’ve been calling you all afternoon. You have a cable from London. And we want to confirm your reservations on Pan American Flight One leaving tomorrow.”

I could see by the way he talked and bounced about on the balls of his feet that he was a flit, but I said: “I didn’t make no reservations. What you talking about?”

“Then Pan American Airways must have booked your seats. It’s this dreadful S.E.A.T.O. session. We’re taking no more reservations for two weeks.”

He handed me the cable. I tore it open and read:

YOUR MOTHER SENT HOSPITAL TODAY. EXPECT YOU
FORTHWITH. LOFTUS BEAUMAN-CREACH.

It hit me hard, that did. If Mom had to go to the hospital something was really wrong with her. Why didn’t old Creach tell me what it was? Was it too bad to put on the wire?

This flit was looking at me, so I tucked the cable in my pocket, and said: “O.K., we’ll take the plane tomorrow and fly straight through to Rome.”

“Flight One refuels only at Karachi and Beirut. You will be in Rome on Wednesday. You’re travelling with a Miss Ogata?”

“That’s right. She’s my wife.”

“Your wife! Oh, dear, we weren’t advised of that! May I see your passports?”

"They're back at the hotel," I said. "Why d'you need them, anyway?"

"Pan American Airways are responsible to the authorities when they disembark passengers. They're heavily fined if your passports aren't in order. Your wife is Japanese?"

"That's right."

"Then we'll want to see your marriage certificate."

"My what?"

"Your certificate of registration."

"We haven't got one."

"Then please contact the American Embassy at once and ask them to confirm your marriage to Miss Ogata. You and your wife registered with the American and Japanese authorities at the time, of course."

"Now look," I said. "We got married at my wife's home in Kuchita. At a Shinto shrine. That's all there was to it. Now you book us on the plane."

The flit's face turned green. He said: "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Hooker—I mean, of course we'll see that you and Miss Ogata get away, but first we'll have to have a certified statement guaranteeing Miss Ogata's support upon her arrival in England and—"

"I got all that in my suitcase," I said. "But why do I need it? She's my wife."

"I'm afraid you're not married, sir. Not legally—not outside of Japan."

"What!"

"Oh, your case is not at all exceptional. Only last week we had a similar couple in the office, an American flyer—"

I looked at him and suddenly this sickness that'd been bothering me rushed to my head, and I turned and walked out.

"Mr. Hooker—!" the flit called after me. "Mr. Hooker—!"

I climbed into the rickshaw and told Muan to take me to the nearest bar where I could get drunk.

"Your wife be angry," she said.

"I got no wife," I said, and waved her on.

She didn't answer, but pedalled away, looking at me every now and then over her shoulder, this frown on her face. I knew she was curious about what I'd said, but I wasn't in no mood to talk, and sat back thinking what to do next.

So I wasn't married! Kimi's trickery had blown up in her face. At least, that was how I saw it, and to be perfectly honest, it took a big load off my mind. I wouldn't have to take her to England now to meet Mom, and there wouldn't be no trouble over this Buddha she had stowed away in her suitcase; she couldn't go ahead any more like she done ordering dresses which I had to pay for because I was her husband, and I didn't have to think no more about buying rings for her or nothing. She'd really scared hell out of me the way she'd given the star sapphire I'd bought her to the old witch—I figured there was some bad blood in the family that made her do things like that, and cut up the way she done over Muan for no reason. The more I got to thinking about it the more relieved I was. As a matter of fact, I felt so good I found myself humming "Roll Out the Barrel," and that's just what I was going to do.

Muan pulled up before a place called River House, and I went in and sat down at the bar and ordered a bourbon. I figured it was empty, but I wasn't sure, because it was so dark I couldn't see nothing but the waiter's white coat swimming before my eyes. I drank up and ordered another, thinking how I was a free man again and wondering how I ever got into such a fix in the first place; thinking how I was here in this goddam inferno with a Japanese girl who'd made a complete sucker out of me, and wondering how I could ever have imagined it working out, with Mom so strict and married to a limey living in Kent and surrounded by dukes and earls. I must have been nuts to have brought Kimi even this far—her and her Shinto ceremony, idols, and all!

I figured I wouldn't tell her we wasn't married until morning. She'd got herself and me into this mess, and she'd have to take the consequences. But she'd been a good sport

while we was travelling together, except when she was throwing dough away, and I wasn't going to treat her bad. In the morning I'd tell her how things stood and buy her a ticket home, where she belonged. Then I'd catch my plane to London.

My eyes was growing more accustomed to the dark, and I was surprised to find I wasn't alone, as I thought. The place was packed with Thai girls dressed in silks and off-the-shoulder blouses with wide cotton skirts, setting at the tables all around me. It was like one of these drawings which you can't see till you run your pencil over the blank paper, and then suddenly all sorts of figures come alive and stare back at you. One of the figures, I saw, was Muan. She was setting on the stool next to me, drinking some kind of punch.

"That you?" I said. "I didn't see you come in."

"You feel all right?" she asked.

"Sure. Is this a bar or what? It looks like a brothel."

"Brothel farther up street," she said. "But girls here very pretty. And you not married."

I didn't like the way she said it, as if she was up to something, trying to find out what was going on between me and Kimi, so I asked her: "You mean I can take my pick?"

"Music start soon. Dance and talk, then do as you please."

"It's that simple?"

"Why not? Oh, you American," she laughed.

"Why you say it like that—'you American, ha! ha!'"

"Because Americans not free like Thais."

"You think we should set around like these girls waiting to be picked up?"

She laughed again, hiding her face behind her hand.

"Because Thai girl free, she skilled in love, like poet. Thai law understand that girl and boy must make love or evil breaks out, and sickness. American law stop girl from performing service, so you have much misery and big mental homes. American girl sly, wife cold, mistress hard, husband 'shamed. Nobody skilled in love."

"How about you," I said, to put her in her place. "You want to make love right now?"

"Much prettier girls to choose from," she said.

"But if I want you."

"Very honored."

"Honored?"

"You think it not an honor to be wanted?"

"Not just for dough," I said, and swallowed my bourbon.

"American girl strip-tease for dollar, pose naked for dollar, excite boy for dollar, then law step in and put girl in jail because she satisfy desire. Very silly."

"You think so?"

"Girl should say what she wants to do with own body. Many unmarried girl in America never have chance to make love because law say she dirty, like missionary you send to Far East say about us. What you want us to do, cheat like American girl? Think dirty because we feel guilty all time?"

I didn't answer her because my head was throbbing, and because I guess I just wasn't brought up like she was. I mean Mom would have had a fit hearing Muan talk like that. I knew there was something to what she said because I remember how guilty I felt when I took a girl to a hotel in Los Angeles and had to sign the book that we was married when the clerk and everybody in the place knew goddam well we wasn't, and even in Atami I'd made an ass of myself because I was so nervous and all, and I hadn't been too much on the ball even with Chico. I mean, who was I to say what she should and shouldn't do with her own body? Maybe it was Chico's "inalienable right" to do what she wanted with her life. After all, that was what these girls could do best, what they liked most, and what they was real proud of doing.

But when the Filipino orchestra started up and I saw a Thai girl in a flame-red sarong, with straight loose black hair to her waist cuddling an American sailor on the dance-floor, I got to thinking about Kimi again, and how she'd cut up about Muan, as if she'd known what she was like all the

time. Maybe because Kimi was born in a free world like Muan, she knew what Muan had in her mind, and that was why she was afraid for us, which proved something. I mean, if there was going to be fear and suspicion between us, then maybe you couldn't be all that free and hold on to what was important to you. Setting there in the dark beside Muan and watching the sailors dancing with the little Thai girls, I got to feeling lonely as hell. I remembered the long days and nights on the farm in Bakersfield and the girls I used to date, and the Jap hostesses I'd met in Tokyo who was much like Muan in their ways and their thinking, and how they was all strangers. The more I got heated up over one, the more of a stranger she became, making me feel lonelier than ever. Until I met Kimi.

She was crazy as hell, but I'd kind of got to know her now, and wasn't lonely any more. It was nice to feel you had someone who belonged to you, who cared what happened to you, as it was nice to have someone depending on you and asking you a lot of goddam silly questions, even if you didn't know the answers. I'd felt that way until this flit told me we wasn't married, but now I was back being lonely and mixed up again. I wasn't going to let on to Muan how I felt, but suddenly the girls in the room, as sexy as they was, didn't mean nothing to me. I wanted Kimi there so I could dance with her and laugh with her, and make love to her, not as I was supposed to make love to her, like a poet and all, but just as we damn' well felt like making love ourselves.

But I knew it couldn't be, and I'd have to send her home in the morning. She was pretty and sweet, but too much trouble. We might have made a go of it if I'd been in the Army or had a job in Japan, if we was to live there for ever, but I could see now it was hopeless taking her to England where she'd be bowing down to everybody, not knowing whether he was a doorman or the Prince of Wales, and where we had to live with Mom. Even if Mom didn't mind, old Creach would have plenty to say, that you could be sure.

Even so, watching these girls cutting up on the floor, I

wanted Kimi like hell. As a matter of fact, I wanted her so bad I felt sick in my stomach.

"You all right?" Muan asked me again.

"I feel awful," I said.

"Pain in stomach?"

"Pain all over."

She slipped off the stool and stood looking into my face.

"Doctor inoculate you at airport this morning?"

"Sure, why?"

"He tell you not to drink?"

"Don't think so."

"I take you to hotel, quick. Last fare drank at bar after inoculation and dropped dead in street. Come."

She slipped her arm round my waist and hauled me across the floor to the door.

"I didn't pay," I said.

"I pay later. Hurry."

She put me into the rickshaw and pedalled off round the corner. I could hardly see out of my eyes, I felt so lousy, but I knew it was getting dark and I must have been away over two hours. I could hear the clanking of the streetcars and smelt the stink of opium as we rattled over the cobblestones, and then we was at the hotel, and I climbed out.

I knew I was going to be sick, and rushed into the lobby, passing Kimi on the way, who didn't even glance up. The last thing I remember was looking back at her and seeing her standing on the curb slamming Muan in the face with her fists. Then I passed out.

15

I WOKE up early the next morning, knowing something was wrong, because there was this long rubber tube stuck up my bottom, and Kimi was standing over me in a sheer pink nightgown, holding a big tub of water.

"What you doing?" I bawled, feeling my stomach swell up like I was pregnant.

"Doctor say give two pints of hot water with medicine."

"Did he say *where*?"

"There," she said. "Never before give this kind of medicine. Very strange, but do what doctor say because you my husband."

"Well," I hollered, "you can take the damn thing out because I'm not your husband!"

"What, Elmer-san?"

"I'm not your husband!"

"What you mean?"

I was about to burst, but I yelled: "We're not married! Your crummy Shinto ceremony's illegal. What you think of that, *Miss Ogata*?"

She stood stunned, as if I'd hit her over the head with a board. This flood of water was rushing into me like a dam had broke, but she just stood there holding the tub as if she'd forgot where she was and what she was doing. I could

feel all hell was going to break loose, so I yanked out the tube, jumped off the bed, and ran for the toilet. As I passed through the door I looked back and saw Kimi still standing there holding the tub, the water pouring out on to the bed, as if she hadn't known I'd got up at all.

When I got back she'd exchanged her pink nighty for one of these plate-armour kimonos buttoned up to the chin. She'd taken old Buddha out of her suitcase and was talking to him again. She didn't look at me when I came in, so I didn't say nothing, just pulled on my clothes, then started packing.

After a minute or two Kimi turned around and said: "What you doing, Elmer-san?"

"Packing."

"What time we leave?"

"I leave at three o'clock. There's a plane to Tokyo at the same time."

"What you mean?"

"Look, Kimi. This happened for the best. It shouldn't never have happened at all. I didn't know I was getting married. You done me a dirty trick—"

She pulled herself up tight, and said: "I didn't do dirty trick. We married like mother and father, in Shinto shrine. Why it not legal?"

"Well, it isn't. You can take my word for it. It just wasn't meant to happen. It'd be different if—"

"That Thai girl! You go with her last night! That's why—"

"That's why it won't work, Kimi! All this fuss you kick up for no reason. And then throwing five hundred bucks away! I guess I just don't understand you."

She stood up and faced me. In her eyes there was something strange and bright I'd never seen before.

"What you mean, Elmer-san, is that you don't want Kimi any more—you never did want."

"That isn't so. I never thought about it until the cere-

mony was over, then it was too late. But now we're back where we started."

"And you want Kimi to go home."

"It isn't as if—then there's Mom and Beauman-Creach—I just don't think you'd get along together."

"Do we have to?"

I didn't answer that, and she turned back to the dresser and said: "All right, Elmer-san. Thank you for being such nice husband while we last. Now please wait in lobby. I change and come down."

I picked up my bag and said: "O.K., Kimi. That's the spirit. We got about seven hours, so let's be friends. There must be some more things to see in Bangkok. And we got to change our tickets."

I knew she wanted to have a cry, so I went on downstairs, where the Thai manager met me.

"You all right, Mr. Hooker?"

"I guess so," I said.

"You big sick last night."

"Yeah. Thanks for getting the doctor."

"Mrs. Hooker fetch doctor," he said. "I call two doctors. No come. After we carry you upstairs Mrs. Hooker get taxi and find doctor herself. Very smart wife you got."

"That's right," I said, and went into the lobby.

Finally Kimi came down dressed in a silk skirt and blouse. We left the bags in the hall and went out into the street, where Muan was waiting. I smiled at her because she'd been real nice to me and got me home safe, and because now I wasn't a married man I could smile at whoever I damn well liked. Kimi must have felt that, too, because she didn't say nothing, just stood beside me in silence while we talked.

"How much do I owe you?" I asked.

"You got wife again?"

"We leave today, so I better pay you."

"You want to see Floating Market? I take you where you catch boat."

"We got to go to the American Express first."

"Not open till nine."

"O.K.," I said, and pulled Kimi in beside me.

The streets was full of these Buddhist priests walking around with their begging bowls to get their daily ration of food. Their hair was clipped or shaved and they wore nothing but bright yellow robes and sandals. They looked real colorful, I have to admit, with the early-morning sun slanting down on their faces as they walked in long parades, or stood singly in the open doorways holding out their bowls.

Muan took us to the pier at the Oriental Hotel where a motor-boat was moored, waiting for passengers. A half-naked Thai boy sat in the back, ready to steer us. Muan said she'd come back in two hours, and we climbed in and went chugging down the Menan River.

It was more like a highway than a river, with big black ships riding anchor in the center of the town, and sampans crossing from shore to shore manned by women gondoliers who stood barefooted on the sterns punting with these paddle poles to a swing rhythm. Tugs passed us pulling long lines of rice barges, and rafts stacked high with teak logs drifted with the tide, bobbing up and down in the wash of the fast police launches. And rising up on both sides of us was these silver and gold-leaved pagodas and temple rooftops glittering in the sun.

After an hour we turned off the river into a *klong*, a regular beehive of wooden huts, sampans, and houseboats. Farther on the *klong* got narrower and the huts closer together so they seemed to squat right down on top of the reeds, each with its own row of steps leading to a jetty. In between the huts you could see, cut out of the reeds, a lush vegetable garden or a pottery yard, a rice mill, or a workshop, and now and then the pink ruins of a temple. Then we reached the Floating Market.

It was like nothing I ever seen before, I mean the color and the noise and the confusion, a kind of supermarket spread out on the water. Merchants in palm-leaf hats as big as umbrellas was selling vegetables and fruit and fish, hot

coffee, blocks of ice, coconuts, potted orchids, coal, wood, and hardware, all from sampan to sampan, each one of which had some kind of gong or rattle to tell it from the others.

There was this air about it like a playground where everybody was having a good time and not minding if they sold anything or not. They shouted and argued and bargained but they never stopped grinning or making jokes or gossiping with friends. I guess it was because you really didn't need much dough in Thailand, not like the people back home, anyway, who was always talking about it and counting it and fretting over it. You didn't need much of a house—you could look right through most of them—and you didn't need any clothes, just a robe like the priests wore, or a pair of shorts, and everywhere you looked you saw something growing bigger and greener than you ever saw it before, which seemed to make everybody feel happy and friendly. Right there in the middle of the market kids splashed about or swam under water, and young girls with flowers in their hair waved to you, and old grannies sat in the sunshine weaving mats and chuckling, and grandpas puttered in the gardens or sawed away at stumps of wood like they was building themselves castles.

Anyway, that's how it seemed to me, and as we nudged our way through the market and back, pushing the sampans off when they came too close, and started back to town, I got to thinking real hard about things, how none of these Thais was rich or poor, and not one of them sad, not like the faces of the old folk I seen in Los Angeles setting around on the benches in Pershing Square looking as if they was loaded with trouble, either because of what they'd read in the papers, or because they was hoping for something they wasn't ever going to get. Here everyone seemed to have enough of what they wanted and didn't care about having no more. They was all just kids, as this passenger on the plane had said, but friendly kids, like the immigration officer who hadn't even noticed that Kimi's passport was no

good. It was a nice change from being pushed around in Tokyo and Hong Kong, and made me think what Kimi had said about how people should get to know each other better. It seemed to me that being friendly was the best way of doing it, kids or no kids.

I looked at Kimi setting up proud and straight beside me, and it hit me that she wasn't no different. Here we was chugging up the river, with only a few hours before we was going to say good-bye to each other for ever, and she was looking about her at the shining temples on the shore as if they was prayers in stone, a smile on her face, her eyes calm and bright, as if what I told her must be, had to be, simply because I'd told her, if you know what I mean.

She was just a kid, like the Thais, the same race and all, and I guess that was why she'd done what she'd done, buying all those dresses and throwing away five hundred bucks. Maybe I didn't understand her, but as we approached the pier I got this notion that maybe it wasn't entirely her fault. I mean, maybe I didn't understand how these Orientals thought or how they ticked because I hadn't ever been to the Far East before. And just because I hadn't, wasn't no reason for me to say what she'd done was wrong because it wasn't what I'd expected of her, any more than it was right for me to be worrying how she would act in London, or what Mom and old Beauman-Creach would say if we showed up as man and wife. I figured I'd been looking at us like I'd look in a mirror, seeing only one face which I recognized because it was my own face. Kimi didn't look in the mirror that way. If she had she might not have liked some of the things I'd done, neither, and maybe would have thought that Mom had some crazy ways and notions too.

I was still thinking hard when we drew up at the pier. Kimi climbed out and I gave the boy sixty ticals. We was early, and Muan hadn't showed up yet, so I took Kimi into the hotel, and we went on to the terrace and sat down.

I ordered two bourbons, but Kimi said: "Only one, please. Doctor permit no alcohol three days."

“Dammit, I feel O.K. And I need a drink!”

“Please,” she said. “Last time I ask.”

I ordered mineral water and some papaya as we hadn't had breakfast, and we sat in silence looking at the river. For the first time since we met we had nothing to say to each other. It was funny, but already I was beginning to miss the idea of having Kimi around, walking with her through the streets, sitting beside her in the plane, or looking through her eyes as well as my own at all the new sights. I was also going to miss this feeling of being married. It'd kind of raised me up an inch or two, having responsibilities and all. There'd be no more of that now, and I guess that's what caused the silence. It was as if we'd come down a wide road together, and then suddenly the road had broken off. There was no going back and nothing ahead, so there just wasn't anything more to do or talk about.

It was no use sitting there staring at each other, so when Kimi'd finished her drink, I said: “Come, we better get to the American Express and change our tickets.”

She nodded, and when I'd paid up, we left.

16

MUAN wasn't nowhere about, so we walked down the lane and turned into the New Road. Just as I was rounding the corner this big truck carrying a load of cement skidded against the curb, dropping a tank-full of sticky grime all over my feet. I looked down, swearing to beat hell, and saw that Kimi had dropped to her knees and was wiping my shoes with a handkerchief she'd pulled from her sleeve.

She didn't say nothing, and I didn't, I was so bewildered. I mean, here we was standing in the middle of the road with the cars and bicycles and samlors roaring past, and Kimi, paying no attention to them at all, was cleaning my goddam shoes. A bunch of American tourists stared at us, open-mouthed, and though I knew Kimi thought nothing about doing a thing like that, it embarrassed me to have her do it, and everything I'd been thinking on the boat about Orientals rushed to my head. I stepped back, picked Kimi up in my arms, and carried her into the American Express Office, where I slammed her down.

The flit was standing behind the counter, his eyes popping.

"Where can a guy get married around here?" I asked him.

"Oh, dear me!" he cried. "You aren't serious, Mr.

Hooker! The bus leaves for the airport in two hours, and Miss Ogata—”

“Mrs. Hooker to you. Where do we go?”

“The registrar’s office is in the middle of the block.”

“Come on,” I told Kimi, and took her by the hand.

Outside on the pavement she cried:

“Elmer-san! What you do?”

“We’re getting married. What d’you think?”

“You want to marry Kimi? Truly?”

“What am I talking about?”

“You aren’t just sorry for Kimi? She go home if you say.”

“Now you shut up and come on,” I said.

She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me right there in front of a whole parade of yellow-robed priests that was walking past. I didn’t give a damn because I was feeling so good. It was as if I’d lost something I hadn’t known I really wanted, but had found it and discovered how precious it was. I spanked her, and said: “We better hurry, or we won’t get the plane.”

“Do we have to? Oh, Elmer-san! What about honeymoon?”

“We’ll honeymoon in London. We got to take the plane. Mom’s in the hospital.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” Then she panicked. “I’m not dressed! And look at your trouser and shoes! We go hotel and change.”

“We haven’t time,” I said. “We probably got to go through one of these long Buddhist ceremonies,” and I took her by the hand and led her down the street.

We found the registrar’s house set back off the road. There was a sign on the gate, so we went in and up a pair of wooden steps to a big sunny room with nothing but a table and two chairs in it. There was a man standing with his back to us, looking out the window. He had on a yellow uniform and white shoes. He turned around, and I said: “We want to get married.”

He waved us to a table in the middle of the room on

which was a big book. We sat down and he asked us our names, which he wrote in the book. Then he took out a piece of paper from a drawer and wrote on that. I looked at it but it didn't make sense to me because there was nothing on it but three lines of blue circles. Then he stood up, and said: "Hundred and thirty ticals."

I gave it to him, and he handed us the paper. "Thank you, good morning."

"What you mean?" I asked. "We want to get married."

"You just marry. Good morning."

I looked at Kimi, who hadn't understood what had gone on any more'n I'd understood what had happened to us at the shrine in Kuchita. I knew then that Kimi hadn't meant to trick me; it was just that every country had its own marriage customs, and because it hadn't happened in Japan the way I'd been used to see it happen, I figured I'd been taken for a ride as she might have figured she'd been taken for a ride in Siam. Kimi was right; people was so separated from each other they didn't know how the other half thought or acted, which I guess was the reason why the world was in such a mess.

But this time I wanted to be sure our marriage was legal, so I led Kimi back to the American Express Office. I held up the paper in front of the flit, and said: "Is this what you want?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Hooker. All we require now is your passports."

I gave them to him, and after looking them over, he said: "Mrs. Hooker must have a visa to Italy."

"No, she don't. I got that first hand from the immigration officer in Hong Kong."

"But Mrs. Hooker's Japanese."

"That don't make no difference. Italy's the one country where she *don't* need a visa."

The flit opened a book on the counter and read down the page.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hooker," he said. "The officer was mis-

taken. All Japanese nationals require visas for Italy. You'd better see the Italian Legation at once."

"Now wait a minute—"

"I'm afraid we can't book you on the plane until your papers are in order."

Out of the window I saw Muan draw up to the curb. She'd found us, so I grabbed Kimi by the arm, and we got back into the rickshaw.

"The Italian Legation, quick," I told her.

She took us to this rambling house on Plernchitr Road where we got out. We climbed some steps and entered a narrow hall where two Italians in white suits lay sprawled out on a bench asleep. One was fat with spindly legs, the other skinny with an enormous pumpkin-shaped head on his shoulders.

We stood listening to them snoring, then I yelled: "Anybody here?"

They jumped up like they'd been shot out of a cannon. The fat one babbled something in Italian which I didn't understand, so I answered him back in Italian. "No savvy," I said.

They looked at Kimi, rubbed their eyes, and looked again. Then they went off into another stream of Italian, nudging each other and paying no attention to me. I thought if this was how it was going to be when we got to Rome, we'd better fly straight to London.

"We want a visa to Italy," I said.

"You *Americani*?" the pumpkin-headed one asked.

"I am. My wife's Japanese."

"*Giapponese!* Ah, so!" They hadn't been able to figure out Kimi's nationality, but now they broke into wild gestures and shouting, punctuated by wolfish expressions of amazement like "*Bellissima!*" and "*Ah, no!*" and "*Ah, si!*" and ending with just "*Ah!*"

"I was told we don't need visas for Italy, but the jerk at the American Express—"

"*Si, Signore. Ze Giapponesi* do need visa for Italy," the fat one said.

"Then hurry—our plane leaves in two hours."

"Impossible to give visa without Ministro. He laying stone for new Catholic church."

"Where?"

"Don't know, *Signore*. Maybe he not return today."

I could see we wasn't going to get anywhere talking to them, so I took Kimi's hand and pulled her down the steps. We got into the rickshaw and, as Muan pedalled off, I looked back and saw they was back on the bench again, fast asleep.

The bus was waiting outside the Pan American Office when we pulled up out front. I told Kimi to go with Muan and get our suitcases, then went in to see the manager. I told him how things stood, but he just repeated what the flit said—that he couldn't book us on the plane without Kimi having a visa to Italy where we was going to disembark.

"But she don't need a visa!" I said. "I know she don't."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Hooker," he said.

"No, I'm not. I saw it written down in this officer's notebook."

He shrugged and was about to turn his back, when I said: "We got to do something. We got to get on that plane! Call the Rome airport and see what they say."

He looked at me as if I was nuts. "You serious?"

"Dead serious," I said.

"If you'll pay for the call. . . ."

"Sure I will."

He went over to the phone on his desk, this smirk on his face, and placed the call. I went around the corner to the American Express and picked up the tickets. When I got back the manager had the receiver against his ear and was listening real hard, not saying a word. He kept nodding as if the guy at the other end of the line in Italy was setting there on the chair in front of him. Then he dropped the phone and stared down at the floor. "Well, Mr. Hooker, it seems you're right," he said. "The ruling was changed two weeks ago and

the Italian Legation here hasn't received notification yet."

"The dumb clucks," I said. "Now can we get on the bus?"

"Most certainly."

Kimi came with the bags just as the driver was starting the engine. I pushed her into a seat and called out the window to Muan: "How much I owe you?"

"You pay next time you come to Bangkok," she called back.

"Now wait!" I yelled, because the bus had already started. "We might never come back!"

She smiled, climbed back on to her cycle, waved, and disappeared round the corner.

"Well, what d'you know about that!"

"I think maybe I mistaken about Thai girl," Kimi said.

"Kids," I said. "Just kids."

Kimi laughed and pulled me down beside her.

THEY put us on this big Clipper ship along with about sixty other people. We taxied out to the end of the field and waited there for the control tower to give us the all-clear signal. It took about twenty minutes. The sun beat down on the shining aluminum fuselage, turning the cabin into a sweat-box. One old lady fainted, and while the hostess was working over her, the plane took off. Then the air spurted through these little nozzles they have just above your head, and everybody wiped their faces and sighed with relief.

We flew over jungle for half an hour, then out across the Bay of Bengal. We was so high up by then that the waves seemed flattened out and the pockets of fog didn't appear to move at all. The water was like a splintered mirror, the sky a hard, deep blue.

The sun started fading fast, and by the time we reached the coast of India it was dark. We droned on and on, and all I could think about was that somewhere down below us and behind us and on each side of us was places I'd read about and always wanted to see: Rangoon with its city streets full of bazaars and working elephants, Mandalay where the flying fish played, and Calcutta with its ox carts and sacred cows, and this Taj Mahal which took a grand Mogul twenty-

eight years to build, the lazy so-and-so. It was a goddam pity we couldn't have stopped over and seen everything—all we did see on the whole flight was these tiny red rashes far below us which the stewardess said was brush fires—but Mom came first and I just had to get back and look after her.

I could see Kimi was thinking the same things, because she had her nose flat against the window trying to pierce the blackness. After a while she said:

"India down there, Elmer-san?"

"Must be."

"We fly all across India in dark and see nothing?"

"I'm sorry, Kimi. Mom's sick and we got to get back."

She was silent, and then she said: "Your mother very bad?"

"I don't know what's wrong with her. We got to get back and see."

"She got husband?"

"Sure she has—Beauman-Creach."

"Can't he take care?"

"I hope so. But it isn't the same thing. I mean, well, we was always pretty close, and she's only known Creach for a couple of months."

"Tell me about your mother," Kimi said.

I knew she meant for me to tell her about myself, too, because she hadn't no idea at all where I come from in America, or why we was going to England to live, or what we was going to do when we got there. So I told her about Mom, what she looked like and all, and how we'd lived on a farm in Bakersfield until Dad died. I told her how Mom had met Beauman-Creach and how he had a house in Kent where he grew hops and had a dairy which he wanted me to run for him.

She didn't say nothing, just listened, nodding her head every little while until I finished. Then she looked out the window again into the blackness, and said: "We live with mother and stepfather in Kent?"

"Why sure, I guess so."

"And you work farm?"

"I always did work on a farm," I said. "I don't know nothing else. You mind that?"

"How I mind? You my husband. I do what you say."

"That's mighty big of you," I said, not too happy about the tone of her voice. I knew that she meant it, but she gave me this feeling which I couldn't explain that she'd been expecting a different sort of life, I guess because I had this money stuffed in my pocket, and because I was able to travel to Japan and all.

"What did you expect?" I asked her. "You'd like it better if I worked in a bank?"

"You must do what you think best, Elmer-san."

"That's right. But if you had a choice what would you want I should do?"

"I think maybe live and work together all over world, like places down there in the dark which we pass over so quick."

"You mean you want to keep travelling? On what? When this money in my pocket's gone I got to start earning."

"That not possible except in England?"

"What you getting at, Kimi? You want us to buy a farm on the Ganges?"

"Perhaps better than to live with mother and stepfather," she said. "In Japan everybody live in one room, uncle and aunt and sister and brother and cousins. I no like. Want to live alone with you—make no difference where."

"Sure, sure," I said. "But you got it all wrong. Beauman-Creach has a big house—twenty, thirty rooms. You wouldn't run into any trouble like you would in Japan."

"Maybe not," she said slowly. "But I wouldn't want to live in big house, either."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"If I had money for big house I'd sell and go round world."

"And do what?"

"Maybe talk to people and find out why everybody so stupid. Maybe study languages and teach what I learn to small children who haven't chance to leave home like me. Maybe go to thirty, forty countries and shoot all nasty immigration officers."

"What you mean is you don't want to live with Mom," I said, furious. "You want *me* to do all these things."

"*We*," she said, "together."

"Well, you can forget about it," I said. "I'm a farmer and that's all I know."

"Couldn't you learn?" she said.

"Learn what?" I said, feeling my face getting redder and redder.

"Maybe go to night school and—"

"Night school! In Kent where the dukes come from? In the middle of the hop fields?"

She leaned her head against the window, looking out at the night, and I reached into the pocket of the seat and grabbed a magazine. But I was still so goddam sore I couldn't see the page in front of my eyes. The plane had started to rattle about, and there was this drumming on the wings that sounded like gunpowder exploding in the air around us, which got on my nerves. So remembering I hadn't had time to shave at the hotel, I got up, opened my bag, took out my electric razor, and walked down the aisle to the washroom.

I plugged the razor into these holes they had in the wall, scowling as I worked over the hairs on my chin, because the damn plane was jumping up and down so I could hardly keep my head still. In fact we was bouncing about so hard the plug kept slipping out of the socket. I jammed it back once, and then a second time, but when I did it the third time there was one hell of an explosion and the lights went out.

I swore and searched in the dark for the service bell. I couldn't find it, but while I was mucking about there came a loud rap on the door. I opened it, ready to tell the steward

what I thought of his two-bit plane, when there, an inch from my nose, stood the Captain in full uniform holding a flashlight in my face.

"What the hell are you doing?" he hollered.

Over his shoulder I could see that the cabin was dark. The passengers was howling bloody murder, and for a moment I got real panicky, figuring I'd probably blown out the navigation and landing lights too, and picturing us coming down on some scaly desert or in a rice paddy because the Captain couldn't see the field. But I wasn't going to let him bully me. It was the fault of his goddam plane.

"I was shaving," I said.

He grabbed my razor and put his flashlight to it.

"What's this?"

"An electric razor."

"What kind? I've never seen one like it."

"It's a Wortle," I said.

"A Wortle!"

"I got it in a pawn shop on Main Street. That's in Los Angeles, sir."

He shoved it back at me and disappeared. I followed him into the cabin where vague forms stood in the aisle yelling at each other. The Captain's voice boomed out: "Keep your seats. There's nothing to worry about—only a blown fuse."

He flashed his light down the aisle and I saw that the door to the cockpit was ajar. And then I don't know what happened. There was a loud crack of thunder, followed by a blaze of lightning that silhouetted the passengers against the empty sky, and then the plane dropped as if someone had snatched the air from under it and everybody flew up to the ceiling and hung there as if their heads was glued to the fuselage, then came crashing down again into the aisle, screaming. The Captain bellowed: "Fasten your seat-belts," which was real stupid, I thought, because you couldn't find your damn' seat, much less your belt. Then he ran for the cockpit. But just as he got there the door slammed shut. It must have jammed, because he couldn't open it. When the

lightning flashed again I saw him standing in front of it, his face beet-red, hammering on it with his fists, while the navigator shouted and hammered on the inside. Then, remembering Kimi, I fought my way past the bawling passengers to where she was crouched in her seat holding on to the steward who was sprawled across her lap holding on to her. Why he'd picked Kimi out of all the people on the plane to grab hold of I didn't know, and didn't care to find out.

I managed to flop into a seat behind them, and things quieted down a little, except for the Captain who had thrown off his coat and was clawing at the door, sweat rolling down his face. One minute, when the lightning flashed, you could see him, and then you could only hear him bellowing like a mad bull. I learned later why he was acting up so. It was the co-pilot's first flight on the Far Eastern route. He hadn't ever been to Karachi before or landed a plane there, and by the way the Captain was acting I could see he thought he never would.

I could tell we was getting near Karachi because the navigator had stopped hammering on the door. The Captain went to the window to see if he could figure out where we was. And I could tell by the way the plane suddenly kept dipping its nose as if it was going to crash that we was coming in for an instrument landing. The steward climbed off Kimi's lap and groped about among the passengers, trying to get them into their seats. Finally he gave up and told us to stay where we was and hold on to whatever we could find that was solid. That tickled me. Solid, he said, after he'd been holding on to Kimi for a good half-hour!

Well, we got down all right. The co-pilot made a perfect landing, in fact. By the glow of the runway lights I could see the Captain pulling and pushing this imaginary control, his face screwed up in concentration, and when we finally touched ground without even a bump he threw back his chest and gave a triumphant "Harumph," as if he'd been the one who'd set us down.

There was an ambulance and a fire-truck on the field

when we got off. Two old ladies, stretched out like boards, was whisked away, then we was herded into a bus and driven to the rest-house where we was told to wait till the plane could be put back into shape. The guy who said it looked me straight in the eye, shaking his head. I was going to slap him when Kimi pushed me towards the bar.

I needed a drink bad, and ordered bourbon, but this Indian or Arab or whatever he was who served us hadn't never heard of it. He was dressed in white pantaloons and sandals, and his shirt hung down to his knees. All he could say was: "Beer."

So we ordered beer. It was a good idea anyhow because it was so hot and dusty. The dust flew around the room like sand blown up off a beach. I only had some loose change in my pocket—yen and ticals—so I gave him a fifty-dollar bill, the smallest note I had. He was about to snatch it off the counter when one of these smart alecks you always run into when you're travelling, came up behind me and covered the bill with his paw.

"Son, I can see you ain't never been to Pakistan before," he said, grinning.

"That's right," I said, looking up into his long, seamed face. "And I don't much care if I never come again."

"Well, son," he said, pushing back this big ten-gallon hat he was wearing, "if you mean that you hadn't better cash this bill—not unless you aim to drink it up here and now before you take off again."

"Why not?" I asked him.

He looked at Kimi, grinned, and shook his head as if I was a crazy steer or something.

"Because you won't get change in dollars. You get rupees."

"So what?" I said. "Can't I take them out?"

"Sure you can," he laughed. "Sure, son. But nobody'll touch 'em outside Pakistan. Not even the steward on the plane. They're worthless." He picked up the bill and tucked

it into my pocket. "Hold on to it, son. If you cash it now you might as well throw your change out the window."

"Well, thanks!" I said, real grateful to him for warning me.

"Think nothing of it," he said, slapped me on the back, and walked off to enlighten another tourist who was fingering a scarf at the souvenir shop.

I took out all the change I had, and paid the bill. Then I gave the boy what was left over. He looked down at the grubby yen and ticals laying on the counter, and turned his back on us. I couldn't really blame him.

I got off the stool and said to Kimi: "Come on, we might as well see what this country looks like—even if we only got a few minutes."

We went out and walked towards the gate, but when we got there we could see these turbanned immigration officers checking the passengers who was disembarking at Karachi. I knew they'd ask us a lot of questions and want to stamp our passports and all, so I took Kimi by the hand and turned back. Then I had a real smart idea.

There was this fence on the left stretching away to the terminal. One of the overhead lights just above us had blown out, leaving a dark patch underneath where we couldn't be seen too well. The fence was made of wood and was pretty high when you figured in terms of these Pakistanis, but one glance told me I could climb it with no trouble at all, and without telling Kimi what we was going to do, I led her up close to it, then swung her over on to the other side, vaulting after her.

"What you do, Elmer-san!" she scolded in a whisper.

"Come on," I said. "We're going to look round."

We walked out into the road—if you could call it a road—and looked around. But there wasn't nothing to see. Just hard-baked khaki rubble stretching for miles, with here and there a mud hut standing out against the stars—not a trace of a light or a bush or a tree or a blade of grass. It was about the gloomiest place I ever seen in my life.

We walked on a way, our feet stirring up the dust, our eyes smarting, until we got to the terminal. There was one dim light over the entrance, a dust-covered old taxi tucked away in the shadows, and a swarm of beggars setting on the ground waiting for the passengers to come out. As we approached they looked up, then pounced on us.

"Let's get to plane, quick!" Kimi said.

"Come on," I told her.

I grabbed her hand and we ran into the terminal. The beggars followed like a pack of hounds. I had my passport and tickets in my pocket, so I wasn't worried too much about getting back in.

We crossed a wide stone floor to the gate where a guard in pantaloons was standing. He asked for our tickets, and while he looked them over the beggars clawed at our clothes. Finally the guard nodded, and we started through.

He put out his hand, and said: "Must pay tax first."

"What?"

"Tax," he said, pointing to a window on our right.

We crossed to the window where an Indian in a skull-cap handed us two tickets.

"Four rupees," he said.

"Four rupees! What for? We're on route to Rome."

"Airport tax," he said.

"We got no change—only a fifty-dollar bill!"

"That's all right. I change for you," he grinned.

I stood looking at the handful of trash he gave me, forty-nine bucks' worth in change, and started to tear the rupees in half, when Kimi grabbed them.

"What you do!" she cried. And smiling this big smile I'd come to know only too well, she turned and threw the lot to the hounds.

WE left Karachi just after midnight on the same crackpot plane, but we didn't have the same crew. So I don't know who it was who put a big sign up in the toilet in black crayon, warning: "NO WORTLE RAZORS PERMITTED". I was real burned up when I saw it, because all the passengers looked at it and asked the steward questions, and I could tell by the whispers that went round they all thought I was responsible for what'd happened when it was the goddam storm.

As a matter of fact, I felt so uncomfortable setting there with a two days' growth of beard, being stared at, that I figured we'd get off at Beirut and take the next plane. But we never landed at Beirut! The world's got so crazy you can't tell any more if a country you expect to go to is going to be there, or if some other country hasn't maybe swallowed it up in the meantime.

Anyway, we skirted the coast of Pakistan in the moonlight as far as Jiwani, then crossed the Gulf of Oman in ten minutes, which I guess would have taken a boat a week to cross in the old days, and pushed on over the desert. We flew so low, the big sand craters that stretched below us shone like polished copper. After five hours the moon went down and the sun came up. The Captain told us we was

over the Syrian Desert. We was still flying pretty low because every little while you could see these Arab tents perched out in the middle of nowhere, and then nothing else for another hour, except maybe a camel plodding his way over the high crest of a dune. Then out the window on our right, white towers rose up through clumps of green trees—we was over Damascus. In a few minutes we crossed into Lebanon, and the steward told us to fasten our seat-belts.

I thought something funny was going on when we came low down over a hill behind the airport and saw that the Medditerranean Sea was jampacked with battleships and aircraft carriers. The Captain must have been shocked, too, because we could hear him through the open door to the cockpit talking like mad to the control tower. We started down for a routine landing, and everybody flattened their noses against the window panes. I bent over Kimi and shared her window. We could see a wide beach on our left crawling with amphibious trucks loaded with steel-helmeted U.S. Marines, and farther up in the red sand-dunes, jeeps and medium tanks raced for the airport. The Captain was yelling for permission to land, but just as the plane dipped for an approach we was lifted out of our seats by the roar of two giant Globemasters that swept past, one on each side of us. Kimi turned to me and I could see she was scared stiff, thinking we'd got mixed up in another crazy war, which I guess was just about how it was at that, because below us, scattered along the edge of the field, was a string of half-naked Arabs sniping away at the plane as we came in. We could look right down into the barrels of their guns.

Then, just when I thought we was going to land, the Captain gunned the engines and up we went, back over the hills again, the way we came. Everybody started jabbering, and then the Captain told us over the speaker: "The United States Sixth Fleet's been ordered into Lebanon at the request of President Chamoun. We've been refused permission to land. We're turning back to Baghdad." Then he chuckled: "Quite a sight, eh, folks? On your right's the village of

Hemlan, in mortar range of the airstrip. The control tower reports it's in the hands of the rebel leader Kemal Jumblatt." There was a loud swish just above us, and the Captain said: "Navy attack plane from the carrier *Essex*. I guess Jumblatt won't be in them thar hills long!"

After that nothing could surprise us any more, not even when we came down in the land of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. We didn't see much except the Tigris River and a lot of big-domed buildings glittering in the sun before we had to take off again. It was a real pity.

We flew back over Syria, and then over Cyprus, then over Crete. We passed Athens spread out on our right, and the Island of Corfu on our left, then crossed the Ionian Sea and flew up the boot-straps of Italy to Naples, finally landing at the Ciampino Airport in Rome.

Since we'd left Bangkok we'd crossed twelve countries in fifteen hours, with only two landings. It was fantastic, yet damn' disappointing because we'd missed all the sights. For a moment I really couldn't forgive Mom for getting sick right at this time. As a matter of fact, I couldn't ever remember her being sick before, not since I was ten. I got to wondering if old Beauman-Creach maybe wasn't treating her too good. Maybe he was a miser for all his hop fields and his castle in Kent. Now that I thought of it, I never seen a skinnier limey in my whole life. Maybe Mom was just wasting away because she couldn't get enough to eat.

It was only ten o'clock local time when we passed through the customs, and after I'd changed a fifty-dollar bill for three of these big ten-thousand-lire notes that take up all the room in your pocket, and gave one to Kimi in case she got lost, I looked across at the wall where they was advertising English Players Cigarettes and told her we'd pick up her papers before lunch, come back, and be in London in time for dinner. At least, that's how I figured it.

We went out into the sunshine and had our first look at Italy. There was high mountains off on our right which looked as if they still had snow on the peaks, and on our

left green fields, dotted with pines, stretched to the sea. The warm air had a clean sweet touch to it after the sticky heat of Bangkok and Pakistan, and smelled of wine and blossom. We was getting used to each country having its own particular smell. Later, when we was to set off travelling once again all over the world, we got so we could tell where we was, blindfolded.

It was when we climbed into this green bus and the driver's face lit up like a beacon at the sight of Kimi that I got a good idea how things was going to be for us in Italy. I should have known what to expect after we visited the Italian Legation in Bangkok. No Italian had ever seen a Japanese girl, it seemed, and everyone we passed in the street or happened to rub up against nearly blew a gasket. It got so I nearly blew mine trying to keep one and then another crummy Romeo from rushing up to her at every corner and throwing his arm around her. If I lagged behind, or turned my back for a minute, I'd find one bent over her, his hair falling down into her eyes, asking her if he could show her round Rome, St. Peter's and all. It was always St. Peter's, I noticed, because it had such a nice ring to it.

The bus driver wasn't no different. He was Italian, and that was all you needed to know about him. He set Kimi down beside him on this stool made for only one passenger, typical as hell, I thought, and I had to sit across the aisle. Up front over the gear-box he had this big bouquet of flowers. Before we got started, while everybody squirmed in the back waiting to get to a hotel to wash and clean up, he took out a poppy and gave it to her.

After slamming the gears about, he finally got us out of the airport and drove down a long straight road that led to Rome. It was a crazy ride. One minute we'd be in the middle of flat stony country with old ruins and a couple of mouldy columns standing naked against the sky, and the next we'd be rumbling through a village plastered with Shell Oil and Coca-Cola signs. Then we got to the outskirts of Rome

and rattled past tall pink-faced buildings lined with verandas, and finally drew up outside a hotel called the Quirinale.

We checked our bags, then hopped a taxi to the British Embassy. It was quite a way and took us half an hour to get there, and cost, I figured, about a dollar and sixty cents. We got out and walked up a big driveway lined with palms and plane trees, to what looked like a palace. We entered a hall so big an elephant could have got lost in it. Way down at the end was this bitty English girl setting at a bitty desk looking like Alice in Wonderland. But she was real nice when we spoke to her, and told us in a voice that sounded like she'd swallowed her Adam's apple that we was in the wrong building.

"You want Mr. Bloater-Carter in the annex," she said, sweet as peppermint candy.

Oh, Jesus, I thought, another one!

So we went to the annex, which was farther down the drive, and climbed some steps. There wasn't any trees there, and the sun was hot as hell. The hall was lined with people waiting for their visas: two nuns who wanted to visit Scotland, a priest off to Hong Kong, and a couple of Italians who wanted to work in the English coal mines. We found all this out while we sat on the bench waiting for the Consul. He'd gone out for a cup of tea.

He came back at five minutes to twelve. We saw him crossing the drive to the steps. You couldn't mistake him, that's for sure. He wore black pin-striped trousers, a black wool coat, a high winged collar, a black homburg hat, and was swinging a black umbrella. Above his lip a thick black moustache reached from ear to ear. You couldn't help laughing, you really couldn't, to see him out there in the bright sunshine etched against the green lawn and the flower beds, looking like a buzzard that'd dropped from the sky.

He walked in, not looking right or left, and went straight to his office. I guess that's where he went, because in a few minutes a pink-faced boy came out of the door and told us that Mr. Bloater-Carter would interview the first applicant.

The priest went in, and he was there for ten minutes. He came out shaking his head, and disappeared down the steps. I looked around at the others setting on the bench and hoped they wouldn't take too long, as there was a plane to London at three o'clock and I wanted to wire Mom we'd be on it.

The door opened and Bloater-Carter came out. He had his hat on again, and carried his umbrella. Without glancing up, he crossed the hall and bounded down the steps.

The pink-faced boy slouched out, reading a magazine.

"Where's Mr. Carter?" I asked him. "We got to pick up our papers. We're leaving for London this afternoon."

"I'm sorry, sir," the boy said. "Mr. Bloater-Carter's gone to lunch."

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WE went to one of these café-bars around the corner and had a dish of spaghetti and red wine, and then beat it back to the annex. We got there at one o'clock and found the nuns and the Italians still waiting on the bench. I asked the boy when Mr. Bloater-Carter was coming back, and he said the office was closed until four o'clock. "Siesta," he called it.

There was nothing for us to do but wait.

At a quarter past four Carter came in, swinging his umbrella. The boy told the nuns to go see him first. They was with him half an hour, and then they came out and the Italians went in, one by one. After an hour the boy sauntered up and said Mr. Bloater-Carter couldn't interview any more applicants because he had an early dinner engagement.

That did it. I guess I put my foot in the pie right there and then, but to tell the truth I never did meet a man who seemed to dislike anybody as much as he did us, or who gave us so goddam much trouble. Anyway, I pushed the boy aside and went into the office, and Kimi followed. He looked up from his desk with this startled, outraged expression as if we'd come to rob his safe. I guess I was a sight all right, standing over his desk in this open-necked red-and-blue chequered bronco shirt I'd picked up in Bakersfield, and

being six foot four and all, but when he saw Kimi's bright round face and slanting eyes, her hair tied up in a pony tail, I thought he was going to burst a blood vessel. He couldn't say nothing, just sat and stared at us. So I did the talking.

"Beg pardon," I said, "but we come all the way from Japan to pick up my wife's papers so she can get into England—"

"England?" He said it with a kind of groan, as if we'd torpedoed his bloody island, as if we was the last people on earth he'd ever expected to have to let in.

"My mother's sick in Kent," I told him. "We'd hoped to leave this afternoon, Consul."

"I'm not the Consul," he said. He didn't explain who he was, but he was the man we had to deal with all right, I could feel it like I'd suddenly come down with cancer. "Name, please?"

"Elmer Hooker. This here's my wife. She's travelling under the name of Ogata."

His eyebrows shot up at that, as if we was international spies using a fake passport. He said: "I can assure you, Mr. Hooker, we haven't received any papers in your or your wife's name."

"But the Consul in Tokyo wired the Home Office in London to send them here," I said, beginning to sweat.

"Obviously they've been delayed for some reason." He met Kimi's eyes for the first time with a tight sour smile, like she was a lemon he had to suck.

"But he said there wouldn't be no trouble."

"The Consul in Tokyo told you that?"

"Sure he did."

"Well, you're in Italy now, Mr. Hooker," he said ominously. "We shall just have to wait word from the Home Office, won't we?"

"How long do you think it'll take?"

"It's possible we might have word next week."

"Next week! But that's impossible. We got to leave right

away. Can't you give her a visitor's visa so she can get in, then we can get the papers fixed up while we're there?"

"Most certainly not! You've applied for a permanent residence visa, and to issue your wife a visitor's visa would be most improper, Mr. Hooker."

"I don't see why." He glared at me, twisting his moustache, and I said: "Then find out what's holding things up. Can't you send a wire?"

I could see Bloater-Carter was losing patience. He was probably scared stiff of the Home Office, and didn't want to have nothing more to do with it than he had to, but I was getting impatient, too.

"I'll pay you to send it," I said.

I don't know whether he thought I was trying to bribe him—I wouldn't think of doing a thing like that—but he jumped up out of his chair as if a spring had broke loose in the upholstery, and picked up his hat.

"There's absolutely nothing I can do until your papers arrive and I have them before me," he snapped. "If you'll leave your address—"

"We got no address. We expected to fly to London to-night."

He twisted his moustache, grunted, and disappeared out the door.

We took a taxi back to the Quirinale Hotel, but it was all booked. I sent a wire to Beauman-Creach telling him I'd arrived in Rome, but that I'd be delayed a day or two by "unforeseen circumstances." I figured he could think that one out for himself.

The clerk at the desk suggested we go to the Albergo di Roma. He said it was near the Piazza di Spagna, on a street called Bocca di Leone, which means Mouth of the Lion, which it sure proved to be. But to be perfectly honest, I didn't care where we went, so long as we had a bed and running water. It was getting to be real tragic how things'd worked out. I mean, here we was married and all and I didn't even know what my wife looked like without her

clothes on. But now we was in Rome for a day or two, anyway, and Mom or no Mom I was going to make the most of it. So we picked up our bags and took a taxi to the Roma.

It wasn't what you could call a big hotel. The expensive hotels was perched on the top of these big steps next to a house where a young English poet called Keats dropped dead. They got a sign up there on the wall telling you about it. It was supposed to be in the Bohemian section, which I guess it was, because everywhere you looked you saw Italians with beards carrying canvases under their arms, and the restaurants looked real nice and dirty.

At the desk the manager asked for our passports. I told him we'd already passed through immigration, but he just smiled and said it was the law of the land, can you believe it? His smile kind of faded when he read Mr. Hooker on one and Miss Ogata on the other, but he didn't toss us out, I was glad to say.

We was taken upstairs to the top floor in an elevator like I never seen the like of before, and don't ever want to see again. It was made of glass and was pulled up and down by a single wire no bigger than my little finger. It creaked and groaned, and when we finally got to the top, it hung there, shuddering like one of these ferris-wheel cars what's got stuck at a fun-fair. We had to wait five minutes for it to quiet down before we could break open the doors and climb out.

But the room was all you could ask for, it really was, with a bed big enough to hold six Italian *signore*. It had a shower, a basin, and hidden behind a screen in the corner was one of these what-you-call-its the Italian women like to sit down on when they wash. It was furnished like a palace—big gold mirrors and gilt armchairs, and had a stone balcony lined with pots of flowers which looked out over the tiled rooftops to the hills beyond.

I wanted us to start our honeymoon right then, as soon as the porter dropped our bags on the floor and left us alone, but I was worried in case Kimi might think I was in too

much of a hurry. She couldn't really think that, not after all the waiting we'd had to do, crossing half the world to get here, but I knew we was safe now and nothing could happen to us, like me getting sick and all, so I didn't say nothing about it, just went into the shower and had a shave and a wash.

When I came out Kimi'd unpacked and put everything away in a big wardrobe the size of a garage. She hadn't changed herself, but she'd untied her hair and let it fall about her face like she knew what was to come, and was getting ready for it, bit by bit, so to speak. The Japanese aren't like the Italians, I can tell you, who jump on you when your back's turned. Kimi liked to take her time and make things real nice, so it'd be worth something when it did happen.

I could see she was thinking like that now, because she said: "Let's have lovely honeymoon supper, Elmer-san, and come back early. Somewhere with music but no dancing. Some small *ristorante*."

"*Ristorante*? How you know how to speak Italian?" I asked her, bowled over.

She laughed and took this little pocket dictionary out of the drawer which she'd bought at the Quirinale while I was wiring Beauman-Creach.

"Must study," she said. "How else I learn?"

"Well," I said, "if you can pick up Italian in one day, you're real smart, because we're not going to stay here a minute longer."

"Yes, Elmer-san," she said. "I try hard to learn so we can visit Roman Forum and Villa Borghese and understand what guide say."

"Villa *what*? How come you know about that, too?"

She took out another book from the drawer called *Highlights of Rome*. "Sorry, Elmer-san, if I spend all the money you gave me. I read while you take shower."

I wasn't going to argue with her tonight, and when she'd tidied herself up we went out and walked through the Latin Quarter, as it's called. The streets, narrow and dimly lit,

was packed with people gazing into the stores, which didn't close until eight o'clock. We got to a market place where they sold fruit and vegetables, and Kimi bought some tangerines and Chianti wine in a fancy bottle made out of straw. Then we found ourselves in a street which was lined with studios and antique shops. In one corner was a restaurant, its doors wide open, singing pouring out of it. Kimi took my hand and pulled me in.

It was just a hole in the wall, it really was, with no windows or nothing, but it was jam-packed. A fat waiter in a dirty white coat led us beaming between the bitty tables to another room where an Italian boy was sitting on a chair strumming a mandolin and singing "O Sòle Mio," his eyes shut, his hair hanging down to his collar. Kimi said: "Oh, Elmer-san, isn't it lovely?"

It was about the worst singing I ever heard in my life, not that I know anything about music, if you could call it that. But I didn't tell Kimi how I felt, and we sat down and studied the menu which neither of us could read.

"How we going to order?" I asked her.

She reached in her handbag and took out the dictionary she'd bought. She looked up every goddam word on the card. People setting around us started grinning, and then what I knew what going to happen, happened. A bearded Italian student in red corduroy trousers and a pale blue blouse bounded over to us, drew up a chair beside Kimi, and sat down, his back to me.

"*Scusi*," he said. "I put into English for you. I show."

He "showed" us for half an hour, and never got up off his chair till we'd finished. We had soup with an egg floating in it, marcaroni stuffed with garlic sausage, and somebody's brains soaked in olive oil. If there'd been a toilet in the place I'd have vomited.

Finally he stood up, reached for Kimi's hand, and kissed it. "*Bellissima!*" he said, drooling. "*Cinese?*"

"Japanese," Kimi said.

"Ah! So! You stay in Roma long?"

"It is up to my husband," Kimi said.

The jerk looked real pained at that, but pulled himself together and asked: "Where you stay?"

"Albergo Roma."

"*Ah, Bocca di Leone!* Very close." And bowing till he hit his head on the table, he spun round and walked off.

"For Chrissake!" I said, when we wasn't being stared at no more. "Why'd you tell him that—where we live?"

"Nothing wrong, Elmer-san. He knows you my husband."

"That don't make no difference with these Italians," I said. "They spit on husbands. I know because we got packs of them in Bakersfield."

"Now you stop, Elmer-san! Why you so mad at people all time? How you ever get to know what people are like if you no talk to them? How you learn about new country?"

"To hell with the bastards," I said.

She looked at me, frowning, and I could see she was real sore. Then she broke into one of these sudden bright smiles that lit up her face like a patch of blue sky what's been newly-washed by rain, and said: "I think I know what's wrong with my husband. Come, we go now for honeymoon, *ne?*"

I could have taken her in my arms and kissed her, right then and there.

BACK at the hotel, Kimi shut up like a clam, except that she kept humming this Japanese cradle song I'd heard her sing once before at the hotel in Bangkok. I might not have been in the room at all. I don't mean she was embarrassed or scared or anything like that. As a matter of fact, it was me who was scared—scared stiff, because I was beginning to see I'd married a damn smart girl who had a lot on the ball. I wouldn't ever have believed it back in Japan, and I still couldn't figure out why she'd taken to me, knowing nothing about me, or knowing maybe too much. With Kimi's education—she'd graduated from high school at Tokushima—she must have known I wasn't no Einstein just by the way I talked, yet she never questioned me or seemed to have any doubts about us making a go of our marriage from the start. She was quite a gal, and I guess I wasn't feeling too good the way I'd treated her in Bangkok, telling her to go back to her island where she belonged.

The thing was, Kimi belonged anywhere. She was stateless and timeless, if you know what I mean. She fitted into this old palace of a hotel as if she'd been born here. I caught her looking at herself in the gilt mirror in the bathroom and got a shock, I really did. She might have been Lucrezia Borgia stepping out of her bath.

I guess I was falling in love with her, that's why I was so scared. I'd dated all sorts of girls ever since I was sixteen, but I wasn't never scared of any one of them. It made me sore to feel like that only with Kimi, who was my wife, but I guess that's how it is—you only feel scared when you got something you want real bad, and fear to lose it by making a horse's ass out of yourself, doing or saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment, like putting your foot through the sheet while you're reaching to kiss her, or calling her by another name in the heat of excitement, such as Maisie who you'd known way back in your past.

That's how I felt, anyhow, so I kept my mouth shut. After I'd changed I just lay down on the bed watching Kimi scribbling on a postcard she was writing to her mother, waiting for her to join me.

When she'd finished writing her card she slipped her kimono on and said: "I be right back, Elmer-san. Must post at desk so Mama will know we arrived safe in Rome."

She went to the door, opened it, then turned and gave me such a bright, warm smile I nearly tore the blanket in half.

I lay back hearing the elevator come up, then go down again, milling over how I never thought of Kimi no more as being Japanese. I'd completely forgot about it, except when some Italian Romeo did a double-take on the street when he passed us. Otherwise we was just a couple like any other, except that Kimi was the prettiest girl I ever seen, with her pitch black hair and her almond eyes, and this skin that sent lightning bolts up and down your spine whenever she touched you.

My thoughts was interrupted by a loud bell that started ringing outside in the hall. If it's anything I can't stand it's bells going off in hotels in the middle of the night. It kept on for a whole minute, then stopped, then started again. I thought if this was going to keep up we wasn't going to have much of a honeymoon. I was feeling jittery enough as it was, and I lay back picturing the bell pealing out like mad every time I took Kimi in my arms. It *wouldn't* be no honeymoon.

It'd be more like a prize fight with me coming in for a new round every time the bell rang.

I was about to get up and call the porter, when there was a rap on the door. I said: "You don't have to knock, Kimi."

The door opened and the manager stepped in. He was about five feet tall, and had a boil on his nose. He looked about for a moment, then said: "Mr. Hooker, come with me, please, Your wife—"

"What's the matter with my wife?" I asked him, jumping out of bed and following him into the hall, forgetting I had nothing on but my pyjama bottoms.

He didn't answer, and we walked downstairs. We went down one flight, then two flights, then I saw what'd happened. The goddam elevator'd got stuck between the floors. Kimi, shut up in the glass box, was ringing the alarm bell and beating on the door with her fists. I could hear her voice, so faint it might have come from the bottom of a well, calling: "Elmer-san! Elmer-san!"

The manager said: "You see, *Signore*?"

"Sure I see!" I bawled. "Get her out of there! What you waiting for?"

"Imposseeble," he said. "Great pity."

"What you mean by that?"

"Mechanic off duty. Pope's birthday. How you say—he go church."

"Then get him out of church," I bawled.

"Imposseeble," he said. "Over one thousand church in Rome."

"You mean to say you're going to let my wife stay there all night, and do nothing? She can't even set down!"

"What can do? We try rope last week, but imposseeble through guard wire."

"Last week! You mean this happened before?"

"Three, four times this month. Five times last month. *Scusi*, but *ascensore* very old."

"It's dead," I told him. "Why don't you bury it?"

He shrugged, and walked on down the stairs.

I waved to Kimi who was still beating on the doors.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

"Impossible," I called back to her.

"What, Elmer-san? What you say?"

"The mechanic's gone to church. Everybody's gone except the manager, and he won't do nothing till morning."

"Oh, Elmer-san!"

I saw her sink to her knees and squat down on her heels like she'd done in her family's place in Japan. It was lucky she was Japanese because that was the only way she could have sat down.

There was nothing I could do but bed there for the night and try to comfort her the best I could. The other guests at the hotel who'd been out late started coming back, walking up the stairs to their rooms. They'd stop on the third floor and look down at Kimi in her cage as if she was a chimpanzee in the zoo. They didn't speak, or raise their eyebrows, or smile, just looked at her, then continued on up the stairs as if it was the most natural thing in the world to see an elevator hanging in space with a Japanese girl in a kimono fast asleep on the floor. They was Italians, of course.

Once during the night I went and fetched the bottle of Chianti wine Kimi had bought, and handed it down to her on a rope which the manager loaned me. She woke up and drank most all of it, then gave me this kind of pathetic, hopeless salute, as if she was in a sinking ship, going down, and wouldn't never see me again. I felt about the same way and nearly bawled, I really did.

It wasn't till half past seven before this Italian mechanic, yawning his head off, came up the stairs carrying his tool-kit. He looked at the elevator as if he expected to find it there because that's where it always got stuck, then climbed up on top of it, tipped his hat to Kimi, who was just waking up and stretching, said "*Buon giorno, Signora*," then started hammering.

We got her out of there in about an hour, and then we went to our room, where we ate the tangerines and finished

the wine. But it was plain we couldn't get on with our honeymoon because Kimi was so stiff she could hardly walk, and I couldn't see out of my eyes.

We got dressed, and then I phoned the British Embassy and asked for Bloater-Carter. He wasn't in yet, but the boy said he'd opened the mail and that Kimi's papers hadn't come yet.

I thought, To hell with it, then got this idea of taking Kimi away somewhere where we could really honeymoon until the papers arrived. In the back of my mind was this island called Capri, which I'd read about. There was a song written about it, too, which I used to hear played on the jukebox down at the corner drugstore in Bakersfield. So I told the boy: "We're going to Capri and wait there. When you got any news for us, wire me care of General Delivery, and we'll come back." And I shut down.

Kimi asked: "Where we go, Elmer-san?"

"The isle of Capri. You'll like it fine."

"By airplane?"

"No, we take a train, then a boat. I don't think it's more than three or four hours away. We're not staying here another night. The whole place might fall down on us if we try to go to bed again."

So we packed up, paid our bill, and got a taxi to the station. That is, we got half-way there, when Kimi remembered she'd forgotten to take the empty wine bottle back to the market where she'd bought it.

"We must go back!"

"Are you crazy?" I asked her. "What for?"

"Get fifty lire for empty bottle. Why waste?"

"To hell with the bottle," I said.

"Must go back!" she said, tapping the driver on the shoulder and telling him to turn round. "Promised I'd return bottle."

"But it costs more than that in taxi fares!" I said, bowled over. And I'd been telling myself how smart she was!

"Don't like to waste," Kimi said. "Why you like to throw money away, Elmer-san?"

"Oh, my God! Now it's *me* who's throwing money away!"

"What you mean?"

"You know damn' well what I mean! Hong Kong—Bangkok—Karachi—"

"Why you so mean to Kimi? You know why I give to beggar—money no good. You say so yourself. You tear up."

"And what about Bangkok?"

"You very mean to Kimi. Think we go back to hotel, not to Capri. Much better if hotel fall down and Kimi dies, then you not have trouble any more. Then you find new wife who won't care how you waste. She spend all your money, you see."

So we went back and picked up the empty Chianti bottle, and took it to the market in the taxi, and Kimi got her fifty lire. The taxi cost four hundred and seventy lire, but Kimi didn't think nothing about that. I was real sore, but I figured women was all alike, and seeing I was married to one, there wasn't much I could do but keep my mouth shut, as us poor bastards has had to do since Adam first met Eve.

What I wondered was, was Eve Japanese? For if she was, that explained plenty.

21

WE bought second-class tickets to Naples and left from the Termini Station, which was about the biggest station I ever seen, most of it made of glass. We must have got into one of the old third-class cars they use when the train's overloaded, because the seats was made of wood, hard as brick, and the compartment packed with Italian peasants carrying food parcels and bundles of clothing. Each had a bottle of wine stuffed in his belongings, which was spread out all over the floor. It was such a tight fit we had to sit bolt upright all the way looking into the gaping faces in front of us. I realized then that, though I'd come to forget Kimi was Japanese, and hardly noticed it myself, I'd have to get used to her being stared at for the rest of our lives. It was going to be so wherever we went, I could see.

The countryside was bare and flat, except for the ruins of a couple of aqueducts which Appius Claudius built three hundred years before Christ, and which stretched for miles. As a matter of fact, they stretched for three hundred and sixty-one miles and twenty feet, Kimi told me, reading from her goddam guide-book.

We pulled into a town called Cisterna, where a man got out and a middle-aged peasant woman got in, dragging a goat behind her. I got a shock because I couldn't hardly tell

them apart. Both had long white whiskers, and both was pregnant. The only way I was able to figure out which was which was that the woman kept eating dried raisins and spitting the seeds out on to her stomach, while the goat lay down on my feet and squirted milk over my new tan shoes. They even smelled alike, they really did.

As we drew near Naples we could see one medieval village after another perched on top of a hill with no road leading up to it or down from it. They looked like castles in the air, real pretty in the sunlight, but I wondered how people could live there year after year without coming down. I guess they didn't like what they found down below, or they wouldn't have gone up there in the first place.

At Naples we was met by a pack of beggars like we ran into at Karachi. They wouldn't let us carry our own bags, and though it wasn't no more than ten feet to the taxi, two guys had to lug them for us. We had to tip them, of course.

We drove down some narrow streets, then came out on to the sea front. What a sight that was! I mean, the sweep of the bay dotted with pines and red-tiled roofs with the volcano at the end puffing white smoke. And on our right was this dome-shaped island called Ischia and another one called Procida which lay stretched out like mud turtles under the blue sky.

We rounded a stone fort and rumbled over cobblestones to the harbour, crowded with Italian warships. Two bitty packet boats lay with their backsides tucked up against the pier. Porters rushed for our bags, and after paying the driver, we followed them for twenty yards to a wire fence, where they set the bags down.

"E vietato," one porter said, and asked us for two hundred lire. I paid him and was about to pick up the bags and carry them to the boat, when another team of porters grabbed them. They took us as far as the gangplank, which cost us another hundred lire. Then this deck steward dressed in a white suit and a braided cap which he must have stole from the Admiral of the Fleet, took the bags and carried

them up the gangplank to the baggage-room. He wanted a hundred lire. Then the baggage master threw them into a closet and handed us checks which cost four hundred lire. I figured whatever it was Capri had that no other island had, the Italians was sure making the most of it. It'd cost us a thousand lire, not counting our fare, just to get on the boat, and I figured it would cost us double that before we could get off again.

The boat didn't leave for two hours, so we took a walk along the sea front. In a few minutes we got to a poor section of the town packed with tenement houses. Laundry stretched across the narrow streets, waving like banners in the breeze. Beggars followed behind us, old men and children offering sprays of flowers, and teddy boys selling fake fountain pens. I found out they was fake because Kimi, as you might have expected, bought one, and there was nothing inside but a rusty nail.

That made me sore, and I wanted to turn back to the boat, but Kimi wouldn't hear of it. She was enjoying herself, I could see, poking her head into every shop and doorway we came to.

We turned a corner and saw a barber's shop empty except for the barber who, typical as hell, I thought, was stretched out in his chair playing a guitar. Kimi stopped to listen, and when he'd finished, she cried: "Lovely! More please!"

The barber broke into a wide grin, his teeth shining. Then, because he was Italian, he said: "*Ah, bella!*" and jumped up. "You like? *Un momento.*"

He dropped his guitar and ran off down the street. We was about to move on when we saw he'd stopped at a house and was shouting through a window. A man came out carrying a violin, and the two walked to another house where they started yelling some more. In a couple of minutes the whole street was full of people, young and old, who'd come out of dark holes in the wall carrying some instrument or other.

The barber waved to us to follow him. We went down a flight of stone stairs to a big cellar with an earthen floor which smelled of grapes and orange blossom. The barber lit a flashlight and we saw the cellar was lined with squat-bellied tuns of wine.

The peasants which the barber'd collected sat down in a wide circle and began to tune their instruments. A woman with dark bristles on her chin went to one of the tuns, opened the tap, and filled a decanter with wine. As Kimi and I sat down she passed the decanter to us. Kimi took a swallow and passed it to me, than I drank, and passed it round. After that the concert began.

At first I could hardly keep from laughing. There was this sudden loud burst of "Santa Lucia" which nearly lifted me off the floor, sounding as if it came from a hole in the ground, because you just couldn't believe it came from the cellar. The barber, his head thrown back, sang like he was Caruso, and all round us sat these peasants in their patched-up clothes staring across at us to see how we was taking it. You couldn't hardly move a muscle or even scratch your nose for fear of giving a wrong impression.

As a matter of fact, when I got over the first shock I liked it fine. The barber had a real good voice. He could make it big or small, according to what they asked him to sing. And he sang like he was enjoying it, like there was nothing else in the world he cared about, which I guess was why his shop was empty. He sang "Ave Maria" and "Le donna è mobile," and a song called "Campane a sera," which sounded like vesper bells was pealing out all over the city. It must have made Kimi think of her folks back home, because when I looked across at her there was tears in her eyes.

And yet it wasn't because she was sad or anything like that. I was beginning to know Kimi a little better now. She liked people, all kinds of people. As big as I am I shy off them, I don't know why. I always have. Maybe it's because I'm so goddam tall I think they're always laughing at me or something. Though Kimi was Japanese, and people always

stared at her, she never took offence to it. It didn't make no difference if she was talking to the President of the United States, to a student from Communist China, or to an old peasant woman, she enjoyed it like the barber enjoyed singing. What's more, she gave something to every one of them. I don't mean money, or anything like that, though she gave away plenty of that, too. I mean she gave something of herself. I didn't like it too much sometimes, but there was nothing I could do about it. And people seemed to sense it, if you know what I mean, and responded. I guess people are much the same all over the world, lonely as all hell. You only have to look into their faces to see that. And when they looked at Kimi they saw something in her face, even though it was a Japanese face, that drew them to her. Not just as a friend. That wouldn't have been enough. They wanted something from her they didn't have themselves. They moved into her life, like I done.

I knew it was getting time for the boat to leave—I could hear the whistle blowing—so when there was a break in the singing I whispered to Kimi, and stood up. She didn't want to leave, I could see, but she climbed to her feet and motioned to the barber that we had to go. Everybody crowded around, talking and putting out their hands to touch Kimi's face, crying "*Bella!*" and "*Bellissima!*" crossing themselves like mad and even bawling. Because they'd been so nice and given us wine and all, I reached in my pocket and took out a thousand lire. I was just about to give it to the barber when Kimi looked up, aghast, and shoved it back at me. I guess she knew what she was doing, but I couldn't figure what I'd done wrong after forking out to all those hungry porters.

Finally we said good-bye, and started on back to the harbor. We got about half-way when a begger in bare feet trotted up to us. It seemed he had some special piece of information just for our ears, because he kept whispering to us in a hoarse voice, and glancing all the time over his shoulder.

Suddenly he whipped out a big diamond ring from under

his rags and held it up for us to see. I got a shock because I could tell it was real valuable, and I started looking over my shoulder, too, expecting to find one of these tall *carabinieri* in a twisted Napoleon hat standing behind me. I asked myself where would an old goat get a ten-carat diamond ring, not that I didn't know the answer. I'd had enough trouble with rings, anyway, and I wasn't too eager to have a battle over another with Kimi.

"You buy," the old man said. "I sell cheap."

"No, thanks," I told him.

"You *Americano*—you must buy. Who else?"

"Anybody else," I said. "Where'd you get it?"

"I find on beach."

"Oh, sure, sure."

"*Si!* On beach," he said, and looked back over his shoulder.

"Beat it," I told him, and started to walk on.

He got desperate then, shaking all over. He wanted to sell the ring real bad, I could tell. After all, there wasn't so many Americans as all that passing through Naples who would pay him a hundred bucks for a diamond he'd stole.

He drew us over to this butcher shop, and said: "Very good stone. Me no lie. I show you," and, reaching out his arm, he swept the whole length of the window pane with the diamond.

I don't know whether he thought the stone wasn't no good or not, but it was goddam good, because it cut the window clean in half. The glass came crashing down in a sheet of splinters at our feet. You could hear the roar all over town as if two cars had met head on.

I looked round for the beggar, but he'd disappeared. Like a genie. In his place stood the butcher, his blotched face as red as the bloody piece of meat he held in his hand.

"What you do to my store?" he bellowed.

"*Scusi*," I said, grabbed Kimi, and bolted for the pier.

WE stood in the prow of the packet-boat, our backs to the curving bay, watching the island draw nearer and nearer. The sea lay like a shield of gold. To our left rose the steep cliffs of Sorrento, and to our right the ragged shadows of Ischia and Procida. We stood without speaking, our hands tightly clasped, as the boat cut a wave in the smooth water which levelled out into multicoloured ripples of sunlight and laughter.

"Honeymoon island, Elmer-san?"

"Yes," I said. "This time for sure!"

"I'm glad. It couldn't have been anywhere else. It's like a dream!"

"No," I said. "Not a dream. This is real."

"Kimi in Capri! I read about in Japanese magazine. Long way from Kuchita!"

"You sorry?" I asked. "To come so far from home?"

"Home?" She squeezed my hand. "Home is where husband is. Always."

We didn't say no more, because the boat was getting close to the island, and the cliffs, which from a distance had looked real low, now towered above us until we had to bend our heads to see the crest. Big limestone crags of purple and grey, moulded by sun and rain, juttied out buttresses or split

upwards into tall pinnacles. Then, as we entered the harbor, the town came into sight pressed between two mountains like a cluster of white cubes. The boat made a wide half-circle, then backed up to the narrow stone landing which swarmed with porters and hotel keepers. We saw a red elevator which they call a funicular creeping down the steep saddle of the mountain to meet us, and Kimi said smiling: "Elmer-san, our day has come."

We found a room with an Italian family in a villa which clung like a hawk's nest to the tip-end of the island, far from the piazza, overlooking the sunlit plain of Sorrento. The room had sky-blue polished tiles, and was built against the face of the cliff opening on to a wide balcony with steps that led down to a courtyard surrounded by tall white columns. Terracotta pots of agaves and aloes stood on the parapet of the sunken garden, the crevices of which blazed with red and white and yellow flowers. Roses and geraniums filled big olive jars like what hid the forty thieves, and leading from the garden a small path wound down the gashed face of the cliff to a sandy beach. Above the house, reaching to the ruins of Tiberius's villa, stretched vineyards and olive-covered slopes dotted with pines and twisted oaks. And everywhere—beyond, around, below—the sea.

Standing beside Kimi looking at the beauty of it all, I was glad we was here and not in Bakersfield. I don't mean I dislike Bakersfield, it's a real nice place, but not for a honeymoon. There was something about Capri that put you in the frame of mind. You couldn't think about nothing else. Every flower and smiling face reminded you of it, made you feel easy and natural, as a place should. At least there wasn't no bells going off in the middle of the night, or elevators that got stuck in the house. The house didn't have no elevator, or even electricity. There was nothing but candles—hundreds of them standing up in these old iron candelabras you see about in the nooks and crannies of the Catholic churches.

We had supper at a long table with the owner and his

wife, the Millanis. While we ate dish after dish of spaghetti and octopus and cheese and fruit, Kimi tried to talk to the kids who leaned over her shoulder or fingered the curls of her hair. There was nine of them, and all slept in one room, four in one bed, three in another, and two with their mother. Mr. Millani was a fisherman and owned his own boat on the Marina Grande. He told us he fished at night by kerosene pressure-lamps, like I seen them do in Hong Kong, because in the daytime he made more dough hauling tourists to the Blue Grotto. He was a big weather-beaten man with arms like chunks of steel and scars all over his face which he'd got in the war. But he was real friendly, and never stopped talking except when he was eating or picking his teeth.

Later Kimi and I walked up the thousand steps that led to the ruins of Villa Jervis, and sat on the terrace beside the old lighthouse watching the mail boats with their coloured sails cut across the moonlit sea two thousand feet below. Then, when it grew dark, we wandered slowly back through the vineyards to our room, bathed in candlelight, where at last we faced each other as man and wife.

If you think I'm going to tell you about it, you're crazy. I mean like the way they tell you in books how a man and woman act when they make love, and how they're supposed to feel: "*She found herself opening like a flower so he could nourish the well-springs of her being,*" can you believe it! Or: "*The arch of her body lowered to him and he surrendered with a moan.*" Or: "*Softly she kissed his breast-nipple.*" Or: "*He leaned against the smooth yielding surface of her trunk, and fainting, fell downwards.*" Or: "*He hugged her so hard her ribs cracked.*"

I'm not going to do it because it's all a lot of baloney. At least we didn't do nothing like that. It was simple and natural—no horsing around, or being coy, or moaning the house down; no swinging from the rafters to make it seem better than it was, or hiding under the bed covers because it wasn't good enough. Right from the beginning when Kimi let her kimono drop off and came to me in a kind of shining

glory, the candlelight sparking her hair, I knew there was nothing we had to worry about, then or in the future. She made you feel it was a natural part of living, like laughing, or singing, or going sight-seeing together. She wasn't ashamed of it, and she didn't build up no halo around it, but she did make you feel it was her right and her privilege to be made love to, as it was my right and privilege to have her make love to me, when and however we wanted it. She was as gentle as a kitten, and as untamed as a cat, yet never timid and never savage, always tender and joyous. For it *was* a joyous thing. I hadn't never understood that before. I mean with Kimi it was joyous, like waking up, as we did the next morning, to the flute of a mountain thrush flashing its song to the sky.

After breakfast, served on the terrace, we took the narrow winding path to the piazza. It was alive with people going to work, criss-crossing back and forth under the stone archways on their way to different parts of the island. Most everybody wore these rope sandals, and carried heavy loads on their heads: straw baskets full of vegetables, or fish, or firewood, or great blocks of stone for the new houses that was being built on the hill. It was always the women, I noticed, who carried the stones. Then suddenly everyone scampered into the bars and coffee shops as a peasant crossed the square pulling an enormous black bull on a rope. Behind him a boy drove a flock of sheep. They passed through the piazza like something out of a pageant, then disappeared, and everybody ran out of the shops and went back about their business again.

At the post office I asked if there was a message for us. I was handed a piece of yellow paper with a note scribbled on it saying to call the British Embassy. After half an hour I got through to Bloater-Carter who was in his office for a change.

"Yes, Mr. Hooker," came his stuffy voice. "I've been studying your papers."

"You mean they've come through!"

"Naturally, or I wouldn't have contacted you. I understand you've applied for a permanent resident visa for your wife on the basis of your Canadian citizenship."

"That's right," I said.

"Have you proof of your birth?"

"Proof? What do you mean?"

"Come, come, Mr. Hooker! Have you your birth certificate with you?"

"Course I haven't," I said. "But I got my American—" I pulled up short because if he was interested in my Canadian papers I figured he wouldn't be too pleased to hear about my American ones. So I told him: "I think my mother has it in Kent."

There was a silence, followed by a weary sigh, as if he just couldn't be bothered. Finally he said: "You and your wife had better come to the Embassy in the morning," and hung up.

I could see we was going to have trouble with the sonofabitch, and figured I might as well go prepared, so I sent Beauman-Creach a wire telling him I was held up because of my citizenship, and for him to airmail my birth certificate to the Roma Hotel, which was the only place I knew, and where we'd have to go back to whether we liked it or not. I told him I thought it was in Mom's jewelry box, where she always kept it.

As the boat didn't leave for Naples until four o'clock, Kimi decided she wanted to take one of these old surreys they call a *carròzza* to Anacapri, high up on the other side of the island. Though the thing looked damned dangerous to me, and the horse like a Knight of the Round Table, decked up as he was in silver trappings and turkey plumes, and two big metal horns which the driver said was to ward off the "evil eye," we got in. If you ask me, the only evil eye I saw on the island was his own. He never kept it off Kimi for a minute, even when we went careening past the cemetery and these plaster figures of Madonnas and saints they have half-hidden in the cliff.

He beat the horse all the way up the mountain, and when we got to the saddle of the island where we was supposed to get the best view of Naples and the whole Parthenopean shore, we was going so fast we couldn't see nothing but the horse's tail bobbing up and down in front of us. We clattered on past a house a doctor named Munthe built with his own hands and furnished with the things he'd dug out of the sea, into a cobbled road where dogs rushed out barking at us, then scraped around a bend, upsetting a mule team carrying a tun of wine, and finally reached the piazza where we climbed out and paid the driver a thousand lire for the experience. It was one which I didn't never want to have again.

We walked through the village with its cluster of white houses, and Kimi chose a path at random that wound between low walls of loose stones to the edge of the cliff. There the path ended. To our left the ground sloped down to the sea. Through the gap in the wall of rock we saw, far below, a bitty creek and the glitter of white sand. Kimi pointed. "We go, Elmer-san?"

"We can try," I said.

We was hot and breathless when we finally reached the creek, almost hidden from above by a clump of pines. White water, the like of which I never seen before, rippled softly over pebbles at the far end and then, suddenly deepening, turned peacock blue where it joined the sea. Kimi stood looking at the sun slanting through the water on to the sand, and cried: "Oh, please! We bathe, *ne*?"

"You mean it?"

"Yes, I mean."

"O.K., then."

We threw off our clothes and stood looking at each other. It was the first time I'd ever seen her naked in the strong sunlight, and her olive-bright skin and shining black hair, which she'd let fall to her waist, reminded me of these Hawaiian girls I'd seen in pictures riding the surf of Waikiki. And yet you couldn't compare Kimi with no one. She was

just Kimi, one minute a naughty girl with a slim little figure and flashing eyes, and the next a grown woman, robust and full-breasted. Standing there facing me, smiling and unashamed, her chin raised up, she was how I always pictured her in my mind—timeless.

Then slipping past me, she jumped into the water. I followed, swimming towards her where she stood breast-deep in the middle of the creek, and dropping my legs to stand, caught her hands in mine and pulled her forward, kissing her and feeling the child's weight of her in my arms. Then we fell back together into the supporting water, our arms interlocked, laughing, kicking, splashing. . . .

Later, lying up on the sand together, I said: "You want?" and she said: "Oh, yes, please! While the sun's still warm on our bodies."

MY birth certificate arrived by airmail special delivery. We found it waiting for us at the desk at the Roma when we came downstairs the next morning. Also waiting for us—or for Kimi—was this bearded Italian Romeo we’d met at the restaurant. He was standing in the front doorway, his hands in his pockets, watching for her to come out. I grabbed her by the hand and took her through the back entrance, where we caught a cab to the British Embassy.

We had to wait for half an hour while Bloater-Carter finished his coffee. Finally he sent for us, and we sat down facing him on these two chairs in front of his desk.

I gave him our passports and told him we’d like to catch a plane to London at three o’clock. He didn’t say nothing, just shuffled through our papers.

“You’ve applied for a visa for your wife, Mr. Hooker. Who is Miss Ogata?”

“They issued her passport in her maiden name,” I said. “But you can see it’s my wife all right, as I told you.”

“I see a Japanese lady,” he said. “How do I know she’s your wife?”

I pulled out our marriage certificate and gave it to him. He picked it up, looked at it, and laughed. Only it wasn’t

what you could call a laugh. It sounded more like a donkey braying.

"Are you serious?"

"What you mean?"

"What is this extraordinary document?"

"Our marriage certificate—we was married in Bangkok."

"Do you really expect the Home Office to accept this mumbo-jumbo as proof of your marriage?"

"They got to. It's legal."

"I can't reply to that until I've read it. Perhaps you'll be good enough to have it deciphered."

"How?"

"I suggest you contact the Thai Embassy."

"O.K.," I said. "We'll be back in half an hour."

We caught a taxi and went to this house way out in the sticks. It cost us a thousand lire to get there. We walked up seven flights of stairs to the Consul's office, and had to wait an hour before he could see us. We asked him to translate the paper into English, but he couldn't read what was written on it any more than we could, and had to ask us our names. So Kimi wrote them down for him, and he stamped it, then we took a taxi back to the British Embassy.

Again we sat down on these two chairs facing Bloater-Carter. I handed him the paper, and asked him for our visas so we could catch our plane. He said:

"We can't issue a visa in the name of Ogata if this is your wife, as it appears she is."

"So what?" I said.

"The Japanese Consulate will have to issue her a new passport in her married name."

"O.K.," I said, got up, and pulled Kimi after me.

It cost us two thousand lire to get to this little house miles up on the Via Oriani. A Jap came up to Kimi and they started bowing to each other. Then they sat on a bench and talked. I could see things wasn't going too well by Kimi's expression. Then suddenly the Jap sprang to his feet, crossed to another room, and slammed the door behind him. Kimi

said: "He won't issue new passport, Elmer-san. Against Japanese law to have passport in foreign name."

"For Chrissake! Your name's Hooker! He's got to do it!"

"Say no. That why they not put Mrs. Hooker on passport in Tokyo."

"You mean to say you got to travel the rest of your life under the name of Ogata?"

"Yes, Elmer-san."

There was nothing to do but go back and tell Bloater-Carter. But when we got there he'd gone to lunch.

We went round the corner to this same café-bar we'd ate at before. We felt real miserable, I can tell you. It seemed Kimi wouldn't never get her visa now because Bloater-Carter wasn't going to let her into England except as Mrs. Hooker, and the damn' Jap Embassy wouldn't change her name. We sat at a table on the pavement talking over what to do, and Kimi said: "You go to England, Elmer-san. I stay in Italy and get job as waitress and wait for you to send for me."

"Leave you here with these two-bit Romeos? Are you crazy? I wouldn't have no wife after ten minutes."

"Then what *can* we do?"

An Italian in kid gloves with a cane balanced on his knee who was sitting at the end of our table looked over at us. He'd been listening to everything we'd said. He nodded at Kimi.

"*Scusi*. The *signora* has trouble, *sì*? Wishes passport?"

"She's got a passport," I said, "but it won't get us nowhere."

"*Ah, capisco*. Japanese document always make difficult trouble." He took out his card and wrote on the back of it. "Go see my friend *Il Ministro* to San Marino. He will help."

"San Marino?"

"*Sì*. Small republic north of Rome. You visit country two three days and they make *signora* a citizen and give her passport. Good anywhere."

"You serious?" I asked him.

"Sì, Signore. I write address. Tell *Il Ministro* Mario Crotti sent you."

I looked at Kimi, and she said: "Elmer-san, it's last chance."

We thanked the guy and took a taxi to this old apartment building where the Minister lived. He was a short dumpy man with white hair, and he received us in his bathrobe because he was having his siesta. When we gave him Crotti's card, he nodded and set us down at his dining-room table. He didn't have no servant, at least we didn't see none, and made us coffee himself in his bitty old-fashioned kitchen strung with pictures of the Madonna. Then he gave us chocolates and wine and took out his stamp album. We had to look at that for half an hour before he asked us what it was we wanted.

He couldn't speak a word of English and we couldn't speak Italian, so we didn't get no place at all. We showed him Kimi's passport, and pointed to one of his stamps from San Marino, and waved in the direction of England, but he just smiled and kept passing the chocolates around. Finally I got real desperate and picked up the phone. I got on to the American Express and told the guy at the other end of the line that I was with the San Marino Consul but couldn't talk to him, and would he translate for us. It went something like this:

"What is it you want, sir?"

"I want to get my Japanese wife a San Marino passport. Ask the Consul if he can do it for us."

I passed the phone over and they talked for about five minutes. Then I got the phone back and the American Express guy said: "The Minister wants to know if you wish to go to Japan."

I told him no, we just come from Japan, and wanted to go to England, but that my wife's passport wasn't no good. We wanted to get a new one in San Marino.

I passed the phone back, and there was some more talk, and then the Consul handed the phone to me again and the

guy translated: "The Minister says he will be pleased to issue you visas to San Marino. He says it is a nice country and if you wish to build there he would like to recommend his brother-in-law who is an architect."

Well, it went on like that for about an hour. It took a good deal of explaining, because the guy at the American Express couldn't understand what we wanted, neither, and thought we was nuts. But finally everyone began to get hold of the idea, and the Minister beamed and nodded that he understood perfectly. Then, just to be sure, I asked the interpreter if we left for San Marino tonight could the Minister fix it up for us to get Kimi her passport so we could leave the next day, and after another talk with the Consul he said everything would be taken care of and for us not to worry about a thing. Then he shut down.

After we'd thanked the old man and said good-bye, I felt so good I went across the street and bought a big Havana cigar to celebrate, then we took a taxi back to the British Embassy. There was an Italian in a tattered sweater waiting outside in the hall to see Bloater-Carter, but we was called in first. As I'd just lit my cigar and didn't want to stink up Carter's office at this stage, I set it on the marble window-sill so I could pick it up on our way out.

Bloater-Carter listened to what we had to say about the Japanese Legation not being able to change Kimi's name, and gave a sigh. He was always giving these big sighs as if we was a nuisance or something, when he was the nuisance, but I didn't mind because everything was going to turn out all right after all. Then I told him about the Minister and said he was going to give Kimi a passport in her married name. We was going to San Marino to get it, if Mr. Bloater-Carter would speak to him about it.

Bloater-Carter stared at us, his mouth open, then picked up the phone. He got hold of the Minister all right because I recognized his voice, nice and friendly like, and the two of them talked for ten minutes in Italian. Then Carter put down the phone, groaned, and said: "The Consul was

pleased to meet you and Mrs. Hooker, but as he couldn't speak English he has no idea why you came to see him, or what it was you wanted. He hoped you enjoyed the chocolates."

"For Chrissake! He—"

"Please, Mr. Hooker! Wouldn't it be simpler for us all if you went to the United States?"

"We got to go to England," I said. "Right away. Now how you going to fix it?"

He lay back in his chair and closed his eyes. For a moment I thought he'd dropped dead. Finally he said: "I'll talk to my colleague, Mr. Fisher-Townsend-Fisher tonight. But I can offer little hope. Call me in the morning."

We left feeling real sick. On the way out I stopped to pick up my cigar, but it wasn't there. Neither was the Italian. There was just this bitty wet stub left on the sill which he'd cut off and left for me. I stood staring at it. It was the last straw, it really was.

By the time we got back to the hotel I was feeling so goddam awful I was ready to fold up. But not Kimi. She took a shower and changed her dress, then pulled me off the bed and told me we was going sightseeing.

"Sightseeing! I can hardly walk! And as we're stuck here for the rest of our lives there'll be plenty of time for that."

"We go to Villa Borghese," she said, and pulled me out of the door.

I walked her downstairs to be sure she didn't get into any trouble. We went through the front door and hailed this cab that was cruising outside. It roared up to us and stopped, and Kimi got in, then it roared off again leaving me standing gaping on the curb. I looked after it, expecting it to turn round and come back, but it didn't. The last I saw of it as it shot round the corner was Kimi locked in the back seat pounding on the window, and this bearded Romeo we'd met at the restaurant bent over the wheel, grinning like a cat who'd swallowed a mouse.

I ran into the hotel and grabbed the manager.

"Call the police!" I bawled. "My wife's been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped, *Signore*?"

"You heard me! By a bearded taxi driver!"

"Imposseeble," he said. "In Italy imposseeble. Your wife go shopping, maybe."

"Idiot," I said. "Call the police!"

"Did you get the number of the taxi, *Signore*?"

"No, it happened too quick."

"Describe taxi, please."

I told him it was blue with an inverted V-shaped radiator, and had four seats, and he said, flashing a big smile: "*Ah, Signore*, you mistake taxi for private Alfa-Romeo."

"Alfa-Romeo! Call the police!"

"*Signore* must keep calm. Your wife maybe have old friend who take her to St. Peter's."

"Go phone," I bawled, and pushed him into the booth.

He got hold of the police and gave them Kimi's description, which wasn't too hard for him because she was probably the only Japanese girl in Italy. Then he shut down.

"What they going to do?" I asked him.

He looked at me as if I was a kill-joy, trying to spy on my wife, shrugged, and went back to his office.

I didn't know what to do, I really didn't. Here we was with Mom practically in the grave, and us stuck in Italy unable to get to England, and now Kimi'd been kidnapped!

There was only one thing I could think of to do, and that was to go to the restaurant, try to find out who the sonof-a-bitch was, and track him down. I pictured Kimi gagged and bound and stretched out naked on some crummy bed in some black hole of a cellar with this bearded ape drooling over her, and the thought sent me running wild-eyed to the restaurant.

I found the waiter who'd served us and explained to him what had happened. He didn't understand, but he did get the idea that I wanted to see the bastard, or that Kimi did, or something, because he led me beaming down the street to this artist's studio and up a flight of pink steps to a red door, which was ajar.

"*L'appartamento del Signore Brocchi*," he said.

I pushed the door open and looked around for Kimi, but

the room was empty. It was a nice place, full of books and paintings, and I figured I must have got into the wrong house when the kitchen door opened and an Italian girl came out carrying a baby in her arms.

"*La Signora Brocchi*," the waiter said.

"Beg pardon," I said. "I guess I made a mistake. I'm looking for a louse that's got a heavy black beard—"

"*Sì, sì!*" she nodded. "My husband go to mass. Not come back yet."

"To mass! Are you kidding?"

"You friend to my husband?"

"I've met him, goddam it."

"You want to buy painting?"

"No. What church is he at?"

"*Sant' Andrea delle Fratte*. You find him there."

I nodded and walked back down the steps with the waiter.

"You sure this Brocchi is the guy I'm talking about?" I asked him.

"*Sì, Signore*. He sit with you and the *Giapponese* three day ago."

"Well, thanks," I told him.

He said good-bye and I walked on to this big old church setting in a square by the same name. I pushed open the door and there the bastard was, just like his wife said he would be—with Kimi! You could have knocked me down with a feather.

They was kneeling in one of these alcoves facing a big painting of the Virgin Mary, can you believe it. The guy was bowing and groaning and crossing himself, while Kimi just looked around. I stood behind them wondering what the hell to do, whether to go up and grab the guy, or to call the police, but then I realized this wasn't no place for a fight, and it didn't look to me as if Kimi was in too much pain. I mean, she could have run out of there if she'd wanted to. Then I got sore because here she was kneeling in a church while I'd been going crazy thinking she'd been murdered or something. She must have read my thoughts because all of

a sudden she turned around and looked at me. Then she jumped up and whispered: "Elmer-san! How you know where to find me?"

I said: "We'll talk about that later. Come on."

She turned and looked back at Brocchi, but if he saw us he didn't say nothing or even glance up—just kept moaning and groaning, and trying to bury his face in the marble.

Back at the hotel I told the manager to call the police and tell them it was all a mistake. He gave me a big smirk that got me madder than ever, then I took Kimi upstairs and asked her what the hell she meant by running off with the slob.

"What you mean, running off!" she said, getting sore herself. "You hailed him and then let him run away with me."

"Run away with you! What you mean by that? Where'd you go?"

"Don't know. Way out to green field with cows and sheep."

"What for?"

"What you think for!" Kimi said, her eyes flashing.

"You mean he tried to make love to you?"

"Why you think man steal woman? All men alike."

"What'd he do?" I said, ready to go back to the church right then and there and finish him off.

"Nothing," she said.

"Nothing? You sure?"

"He couldn't," she said. "He talked so much, how pretty I was and how his wife didn't understand him, and how all his life he wanted to make love to Japanese girl that when he tried, he couldn't."

"You mean he *tried*!"

"How could I help, Elmer-san? He big man in one way. Not in other way. Very sad. He fall on ground and cry because he couldn't. I felt so sorry for him."

"I'll kill the bastard!" I said.

"Why you always want to kill, kill! You not understand that all men not like you. You very lucky."

"Sure, sure," I said.

"He felt so bad because he couldn't, he brought me to church and asked me to pray for him. I never been to Christian church before, so I went to see what it's like."

"While I combed the bloody town thinking you was murdered!"

"Silly boy-san. I no little girl who can't take care of herself. I learn much about men in Japan."

"I bet you did!"

"Better to learn than—how you say—be caught napping." She looked up and smiled, then kissed me, and said: "You never have to worry about Kimi, promise. She take care of herself because she happy, or she wouldn't marry you in first place."

"It might have been anybody," I said, sore as hell. "Why'd you pick me? You mean to say you looked across at me in the police station in Tokyo and fell in love—just like that?"

"I don't know, Elmer-san. You not think like Japanese girl. It isn't who we find for husband, but how we treat husband after we find him that makes happy marriage."

"What you mean is, it *could* have been anybody!"

She said slowly: "Maybe, Elmer-san. And maybe not. Who can tell why you came such long way to Japan, and I go first time in my life to Ginza bar and we meet? I think not. I think maybe you only man for me in whole world. Come, forget about, because I want my husband now, so very much. . . ."

I DIDN'T get hardly any sleep that night because there was so much on my mind that was bothering me, and when finally we got up in the morning and finished breakfast I phoned Bloater-Carter and asked him if he had any news for us. He said they was still considering Kimi's case, but for me to come to the office after I'd got a letter from the Canadian Consul saying I was a Canadian citizen.

"But you seen my birth certificate!" I told him.

"We also require a letter from the Consul," he sighed.

"What you want him to say in this letter?" I asked.

He choked, then bawled, "You don't really want me to comment on that, Mr. Hooker! Or do you wish to infer that the British Embassy indulges in collusion?"

"Beg pardon," I said. "I'll get the letter as soon as I can."

Though I didn't have much hope now of ever getting to England, Kimi'd already started packing our bags as if everything was settled. I watched her folding up my shirts and pulling my socks into these little balls the way she liked to have them, and then she started packing her own things. She laid out her nighty, and her bra, then up came old Buddha, shining like a demon out of hell. I'd almost forgotten about it because of all the other troubles I'd had, but

now I exploded. I grabbed the thing and threw it into the waste basket.

"What you do, Elmer-san!" Kimi cried, madder than I ever saw her. "Why you treat honorable Buddha so? You want airplane to crash on way home?"

"In the first place," I told her, "I don't guess we'll ever get to go home, and in the second place we're Christians and don't worship graven images. You want Mom to drop dead? She will if she sees it."

"Christian! What is Christian?"

"You know bloody well what it is!" I said.

"I don't know. That's why I ask. That's why I go to Christian church, to learn. In Japan Americans win war and say Shinto faith no good, bad to worship Emperor, must change to Christian. Old people smile and pay no attention because so late to change, but students and young people back from war truly interested and want to believe. So they look at America because it's head of Christian world."

"We got no idols there, that I can tell you!"

"So we look and see what Christian world has before making decision. It has more crime than Japan, more divorce, more people out-of-head in asylum. America only country to use atomic bomb. Children read funny paper about war and bandit and have small war every day in street. Movie show war and murder week after week. America turn away Christian Negro from church because white members embarrassed. Shinto priest in Tokyo tell me Jesus have very hard time getting into Christian church in America."

"Oh, for Chrissake!" I said, not dreaming she would get so het up by what I done, and not knowing how to answer her.

"As long as Christian go to church everything fine," she said. "Then he swear like you swear and make love to other man's wife, and go to church for big mass. Church don't mind because church need member. Numbers very, very important. Members need church to be close to God, not

to give up life to God, like poor Buddhist. Rich man very close to God in America. You laugh because we worship Emperor, but in war we died for Emperor, but you not die for Christian. So we look and say culture not good enough for Japan. Not strong as Buddhist faith, which asks much sacrifice. So we reject."

"*You* reject, too?" I asked her.

"Until understand Christian better, yes. Until sure it strong faith and not just talk."

I looked at her and saw that she was dead serious, so I shrugged and took the Buddha from the waste basket and gave it back to her. She didn't say nothing more, just wrapped it in her nylons and tucked it into her suitcase, then we went out.

We took a taxi to the Canadian Embassy, which was about half an hour away. They had a big marble palace, too, crowded with people waiting to see the Consul because the Vice-Consul and his secretary was sick. I could see we would be there a week if I didn't do something, so I wrote a note telling the Consul about Mom, and that we had to see him right away.

We sat down on this embroidered silk sofa and waited. In ten minutes the Consul came out, pushing his way through the crowd, blowing his nose like a trumpet, looking as if he should be in hospital, too. He was a real nice guy, young with blond hair and this twinkle in his eye that warmed your heart after the glassy fish-eyes belonging to Bloater-Carter.

He took us to his office and asked us what the trouble was. I told him Bloater-Carter wanted a letter stating I was a Canadian citizen. He asked for my birth certificate, which I gave him. Then he looked up the law in a big book he had on his desk, nodded, and banged out the letter himself on the typewriter, picking away at the keys with one finger, sneezing and blowing his nose while he wrote: "*Please be informed that in conformity with the Canadian Citizenship Act, Mr. Elmer Hooker, who was born in British Columbia*

on January 10, 1936, is a natural born Canadian Citizen, and is thereby entitled to all rights and privileges normally granted to Canadian citizens." Then he dated it, stamped it with a big red seal, and took us out a side-door where he shook hands and wished us luck. It was so unexpected after what we'd been through at the British Embassy, and he was so damn' nice, I wanted to tear up the paper and take a plane right then and there to Canada.

Back at the British Embassy Bloater-Carter looked out of his glassy eyes and said he couldn't comment on whether he could give us visas or not until he'd seen the letter from the Canadian Consul. So I grinned and gave it to him. He read it slowly, then read it again, and gave a sigh.

"Oh, dear, no!" he said. "This won't do at all. We must have a letter stating that you are a Canadian citizen even though you are the bearer of an American passport."

"What! Why didn't you tell me! I asked you what you wanted him to say!"

He looked across at me, glared, and pushed the letter back. Then he rang the bell for the next applicant.

After half an hour we got back to the Canadian Embassy. The same people was still waiting in line to see the Consul. When they saw us and knew how we'd pushed our way ahead of them before, they looked black thunder and turned their backs, which was just fine, because I left Kimi and went right past them into the Consul's office without even knocking.

The Consul was talking to this old lady who looked up, furious, when I walked in. Even the twinkle in the Consul's eye kind of faded when he saw me.

"Well!" he said. "What is it now, Hooker?"

"I'm awful sorry to barge in on you again, sir," I said. "But Mr. Bloater-Carter wants you to write that I'm a Canadian citizen even though I got an American passport."

He looked at me kind of surprised, then said: "Excuse me," to this old gal who was near having a fit because I'd butted in on her, and went back to the typewriter, adding a

line at the end. I thanked him, and pushed my way out through the queue.

Back at the British Embassy we had to wait an hour for Bloater-Carter. Finally I laid the goddam letter on the desk in front of him, and said: "Now can we have our visas!"

He read the letter over and said: "Oh, no, this won't do. Somebody has merely doctored it."

"What you mean, *somebody*? The Consul wrote what you asked for."

"That might be true, and again it might not be. You may have typed the sentence yourself, Mr. Hooker."

"But I didn't! Of course I didn't!"

He shrugged, and we stood glaring at each other.

"So what you want now?" I asked him finally.

"The letter must be re-typed with a fresh signature and seal."

"I can't do it!" I told him, so mad I was going to hit him even if we never got to England. "The Consul'll murder me. The Vice-Consul's sick and—"

"Very well, Mr. Hooker," he said, and looked at the ceiling.

I stood there steaming. Then I said: "O.K. If I get the Consul to do it, can I book our seats? Can we get our visas?"

"I can say nothing until the letter is on my desk."

"But you can give me some idea, can't you, so we can know if we can leave or not?"

"No, Mr. Hooker," he said.

We glared at each other again, and he knew what I was thinking all right, because he took his umbrella off the chair next to him and laid it across his knees in case I was going to swat him. Instead I turned and walked out of the room.

The people in the line waiting outside the Consul's office at the Canadian Embassy didn't get sore when they saw us this time. I guess they thought I was one of the regular employees or the Ambassador or something, because we was in and out so much. But the Consul was damn' mad when I went in to see him, and snapped: "Hooker, I'm afraid—"

"You got to listen," I said. "You got to! It's a matter of life and death. This Bloater-Carter—"

He wrote the name down on his pad, and said: "I want a word with this fellow."

"O.K.," I said. "But not now—not until we get a plane out of here. He wants you to write the letter over. He says he don't believe you added the sentence. He thinks I did."

The Consul looked at me, snorted, then stamped over to the typewriter and wrote the letter all over again. I took a deep breath and waited till he'd finished, then turned and bolted for the door.

"Mr. Hooker!" he yelled after me.

"Yes, sir?"

"Your letter," he said, real pained.

We took a taxi back to the British Embassy, but as I figured Bloater-Carter wasn't there. This pink-faced boy was setting at his desk, and on it was our two passports, stamped with our visas.

"The letter?" the boy said.

I gave it to him, and he handed us our passports.

"Have a nice trip," he said.

"Thanks," I said. "For nothing."

As we went out and down the steps I saw Bloater-Carter creeping through the trees in his black homburg, black striped trousers, and black umbrella, making for a taxi that was drawn up in the drive. I was about to run after him when Kimi said: "No, Elmer-san! We have visas. We be in England three or four hours. Come, we forget troubles, *ne*?"

She didn't know what she was talking about.

WE bought our tickets at the B.E.A. office and went back to the hotel to change. Kimi wore her kimono because it was more comfortable in the plane, and I wore my blue suit. Then we went downstairs where we found a telegram waiting for us at the desk.

HOPE LOFTUS HASN'T WORRIED YOU OR CAUSED YOU
ANY INCONVENIENCE STOP HAD NASTY GASTRIC ATTACK
BUT FEELING QUITE WELL NOW STOP ENJOY YOUR
TRIP DEAR BOY AND PLEASE DON'T HURRY HOME STOP
YOUR LOVING MOM

That did it! After flying half-way round the world to put her in her grave!

It was too late to turn round and go back, so I sent her a wire telling her I was arriving at the London Airport at four o'clock with my bride. I figured it was best to break the news like that, one dose at a time, in case she wasn't as well as she thought.

We took a taxi to the airport and got on to this big Viscount which had four screaming engines driven by paraffin. We took off and flew over Rome, then skirted the coast as far as this island called Elba where Napoleon lived, passed Genoa and Milan, then climbed up over the Alps, which

was really something. I never seen such big mountains before in my life. Then we passed over Switzerland into France, where the stewardess served us tea.

She had a hard time doing it, though, because she was in charge of these two little coal black pickaninnies from Ghana, twin girls of five with long pigtails hanging down to their knees. They kept running up and down the aisle poking their noses into everybody's business, driving the passengers wild.

Everybody but Kimi, that is, who took to them like a duck to water, wanting to know who they was, and where they come from, and where they was going.

The stewardess told us: "The poor little darlings, their parents were killed in a train crash and they're on their way to New York to live with their aunt."

"How terrible!" Kimi said, taking one on to her lap and fiddling with a big red bow that held a pigtail together.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," the stewardess said. "Their papers are waiting for them in London at the American Embassy, and they have to have physical exams. They're booked to leave in three days on B.O.A.C., and I'm supposed to look after them, but I won't be able to as I have a flight to Frankfurt tomorrow."

Kimi's eyes lit up. Knowing what was coming, I grabbed her and said: "No, Kimi! *No!* Now you wait—"

"Oh, my husband and I will take care, won't we, Elmer-san?" she said. "We have big house in country where they can stay, then we'll put them on plane for America."

"Kimi!" I bawled. "You shut up!"

Everyone turned round in their seats and glared at us. The pickaninnies who understood everything jumped up on to our laps, one on mine and one on Kimi's, and started screaming and clapping their hands, but I pushed mine off. She fell flat on her face in the aisle and began to howl bloody murder. Then a big ugly bruiser who was sitting in front of me got up and came over and looked down into my face as if he was going to wallop me. But seeing I was bigger

than he'd reckoned, he bent down instead, picked the kid up, and slammed her back on to my lap.

"Watch yourself, young fellow," he said, "or I toss you out the window on top of them mountains! What you trying to do, murder the poor little critter?"

"I'd sure like to," I said. And then to Kimi: "What you think you're doing! What's Beauman-Creach going to say, and Mom? You can't do it! You just can't!"

Then I looked up and saw this slob with white eyes and white clipped hair staring down at us, and nearly passed out. It was Boris Karloff!

I didn't know what to think, not that I could think at all with him standing there over me, but I was sure now he was Frankenstein come to blow us all to hell. But he just said:

"I hope you will look after the children, ma'am. They'll be quite safe with you, I'm sure." Then he smiled and pulled out this card from his briefcase, and said: "Forgive me, but we've rubbed elbows before. I don't know if you were aware of it or not, but I remember you well at the airport in Hong Kong, and at the Thieves' Market in Bangkok. I know nothing of your circumstances, but if you ever have the opportunity or the desire to join our organization I'd be pleased to see that you're accepted as a staff member."

"You mean you're offering my wife a job?" I asked him, bowled over.

"Exactly," he said. "And it's possible we might find a place for you, too, young man, provided you allow your wife to carry on in the spirit in which she is obviously accustomed. She's an unusual woman. I might even say an extraordinary one, and I say it because I'm in a position to know. So few of us today have the time or the patience to think of others, to be concerned about them. I suggest, young fellow, that you permit your wife to follow her inclinations, and if I may be so presumptuous, follow her lead and take special note of her concern and generosity. Now, forgive me," he said, dropped his card on my lap, and walked back to his seat.

I picked up the card and read:

Mr. J. Xavier Bendix,
U.N.E.S.C.O.,
Avenue Kléber,
Paris, France.

And on the back was written: *"To contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human and fundamental freedoms which are offered for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion, but the Charter of the United Nations."*

"For Chrissake!" I said, handing the card to Kimi.

She took it, read it, then tucked it into her handbag. She didn't say nothing, and I didn't, but I knew what was going on in her mind all right, and could see us turning smack around when we got to London to go back where we started.

But I wasn't too bothered about it because I realized Kimi knew what she was doing, and after all the trouble we'd been through with immigration and all, I figured there was plenty of room for improvement, and as somebody had to set things straight it might as well be us, seeing we'd had so much experience. I figured I couldn't always work on a farm, not on Beauman-Creach's, anyway, and to be perfectly honest, seeing even as little of the world as we done had made me restless, impatient to see more. And then I'd come to realize Kimi was about the one girl I could get along with, which was damn' funny when you think of it, seeing how we'd met and how we'd got married without me even knowing it, but it was true. A Jap, and a hick farmer from Bakersfield, California! About as far apart as two poles could get, and yet she was the one person who'd figured me out and opened me up and who could do with me almost anything she wanted. She was mine and I was hers, and it wasn't ever going to change. Never.

We landed at the airport, picked up the kids, and climbed some long stairs to the customs, where they looked over our passports and went through our bags. Then we passed through these double glass doors where Mom and Beauman-Creach was waiting for us; Mom in a bright blue dress and a big hat made out of artificial fruit like she always wore, and Creach in a pair of baggy flannels.

“Mom!” I called. “Hey, Mom, I want you to meet—”

She looked at me, and then at Kimi standing in her kimono holding on to these two coal-black pickaninnies, one on each side of her, and passed out cold in Beauman-Creach’s arms. I guess she must have thought the kids was ours or something, I don’t know. Anyway, she passed out, which maybe was a good thing, because then she didn’t see Kimi fall down on her knees in front of everybody, bowing like mad, or this customs man come flying up to us with old Buddha under his arm which he’d taken out of Kimi’s bag and forgotten to put back.

It was quite a homecoming, it really was.

Ronald Kirkbride is a Californian whose early years were spent in South Carolina. His interest in people is world wide, and one of his concerns as a writer is to further harmony among them. He knows many countries intimately and pictures these backgrounds with a penetrating but gentle humor.

Mr. Kirkbride's prolific literary career began at 16 with the publication of his life of de Maupassant and attained an enviable distinction in 1945 when his *WINDS, BLOW GENTLY* led the fiction lists for more than six months, to be subsequently translated into five languages. Then followed an interlude of five years script writing in Hollywood, after which he went to England to write a novel inspired by the colorful history of his English ancestors.

The author's romantic experiences in the East where he met and married his Japanese wife Junko have served as the basis for this novel and for its predecessor *TAMIKO*, both of which are being made into motion pictures. His novel now in progress has present day Poland for its setting, which is not surprising from an author with an international viewpoint.

